

# Asbestos Exposure in the Demolition and Renovation Industries

## OHS information for employers and workers

### Introduction

Asbestos is a group of naturally occurring fibrous minerals with unique physical characteristics including extraordinary tensile strength, poor heat conduction and resistance to chemical attack. For these reasons, asbestos was often used as an ingredient in a wide range of building products. Unprotected workers can be exposed to asbestos mainly by breathing in the fibres which are released when these asbestos-containing building products are disturbed.

During demolition and renovation activities asbestos fibres may be released if building materials containing asbestos are disturbed. If the building was built before 1990 there is a greater risk that some materials may contain asbestos.

### HEALTH EFFECTS – Exposure to Asbestos

Asbestos fibers accumulate in the lungs causing scarring and inflammation. As the scarring and inflammation progresses, it can affect breathing and lead to serious and irreversible health problems. Exposure to all types of asbestos can cause lung cancer, mesothelioma, cancer of the larynx and ovary, as well as other non-cancerous lung disorders like asbestosis and pleural disease.

### What to Do if You Suspect You Are Exposed to Asbestos in the Workplace?

If you suspect that a demolition or renovation project is resulting in worker exposure to asbestos, contact the Alberta Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Contact Centre at (toll free) 1-866-415-8690.

If you suspect you have been exposed to asbestos, report the incident to the Occupational Health and Safety Contact Centre and tell your doctor. Medical monitoring assesses the health effects of exposure to asbestos long after the exposure has occurred. Most people do not show any signs or symptoms resulting from asbestos-related disease for at least 10-20 yrs. Only a doctor can assess if your health problems are from exposure to asbestos.

### Where Can You be Exposed to Asbestos During Demolition Work?

If a building is to be demolished/renovated, the employer must ensure that any asbestos-containing materials that will be disturbed are removed. Some municipal jurisdictions require confirmation that this has been completed before demolition or development permits are issued. If a structure is to be demolished with the asbestos left in place an acceptance must be obtained from Alberta OHS.

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The following building products may contain asbestos:

- ceiling tiles;
- drywall mud;
- exterior stucco and siding;
- furnace/boiler duct tape and wrap;
- light fixtures.
- mechanical insulation;
- pipe insulation;
- plaster;
- roofing materials;
- vermiculite attic or block insulation;
- vinyl asbestos floor tiles; and
- vinyl sheet flooring.

Workers may be exposed to asbestos during the following demolition/renovation related activities:

- the demolition of asbestos containing structures using heavy equipment;
- disposal of asbestos-containing waste;
- transfer and dumping of asbestos-containing waste;
- hand demolition of asbestos-containing structures or materials;
- site cleaning activities where asbestos has been disturbed;
- renovation projects where demolition is conducted or following the completion of an uncontrolled demolition; or
- handling of equipment and materials contaminated with asbestos.

## How Can Exposure be Controlled?

The removal of asbestos containing materials prior to demolition by a trained and competent employer is a legislated requirement. The *Alberta Asbestos Abatement Manual* provides best practices and outlines the appropriate controls to follow for asbestos abatement in Alberta.

## Asbestos Waste Disposal

Asbestos in Alberta must be transported in accordance with the Provincial Dangerous Goods Transportation and Handling Act and the Dangerous Goods Transportation and Handling Regulation. Asbestos must be disposed of in accordance with the Alberta Environment document [Guidelines for the Disposal of Asbestos Waste](#). The waste must not enter the general waste stream, and it must be sent to a class 1 or 2 landfill designated by Alberta Environment.

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## Contact Us

### OHS Contact Centre

Edmonton & Surrounding area

- 780-415-8690

Throughout Alberta

- 1-866-415-8690

Deaf or hearing impaired:

- 780-427-9999 (Edmonton)
- 1-800-232-7215 (Alberta)

### Website

[work.alberta.ca/ohs-contact us](http://work.alberta.ca/ohs-contact-us)

## FOR MORE INFORMATION:

[Alberta Asbestos Abatement Manual](#)

[Asbestos at the Worksite](#)

[Asbestos-Containing Materials in Buildings to be Demolished](#)

## Get Copies of OHS Act, Regulation and Code

### Alberta Queen's Printer

[www.qp.gov.ab.ca](http://www.qp.gov.ab.ca)

### Occupational Health and Safety

[work.alberta.ca/ohs-legislation](http://work.alberta.ca/ohs-legislation)

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This material is current to February 2017. The law is constantly changing with new legislation, amendments to existing legislation, and decisions from the courts. It is important imperative that you and keep yourself informed of the current law in this area.

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