

ASBESTOS

PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUE

Asbestos is the common name for a group of naturally occurring mineral fibers that are known for their high tensile strength and thermal insulating properties. When Asbestos is disturbed, it can break down into microscopic fibers that may become airborne. Once airborne, these fibers can be inhaled and trapped in the lungs, posing a health threat. Breathing Asbestos can cause respiratory diseases including Asbestosis, lung cancer, and mesothelioma. The latency period associated with these diseases can involve several decades. Exposure to Asbestos may increase the risk of the following diseases:

- Asbestosis- a scarring of the lung tissue or linings of the lung that reduces lung function and make breathing more difficult. Once the scarring has begun, Asbestosis is irreversible.
- Mesothelioma- a cancer of the thin membranes lining the chest and abdomen. It is almost exclusively caused by exposure to Asbestos and is almost always fatal.
- Lung cancer and other cancers such as cancers of the larynx, tongue, sinuses, mouth, throat, stomach, colon, rectum, intestines, kidney, pancreas, and gall bladder.

LAWS AND REGULATIONS

- **RSA 141-E Asbestos Management & Control** – NH Statute to enforce asbestos exposure standards and to control the exposure of the public to asbestos. <http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/rsa/html/x/141-e/141-e-mrg.htm>
- **N.H. Code of Administrative Rules Env-A 1800** – NH Department of Environmental Services, Asbestos Management & Control NH. <http://des.nh.gov/organization/commissioner/legal/rules/documents/env-a1800.pdf>
- **US EPA Asbestos Hazard Emergency Response Act (AHERA) for Schools**, <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/USCODE-2009-title15/html/USCODE-2009-title15-chap53-subchapII.htm>

ROLE OF THE HEALTH OFFICER

The health officer should be aware of the requirements regarding Asbestos management and control that apply to school maintenance along with building demolition and renovation projects. The NH Department of Environmental Services' (DES) brochure; *Renovation, Demolition & Asbestos - What Building Owners & Contractors in New Hampshire Should Know* that reviews these requirements is located at: http://des.nh.gov/organization/commissioner/pip/publications/ard/documents/asbestos_brochure.pdf.

RSA 141-E and the N.H. Code of Administrative Rules Env-A 1800 establish certain requirements to properly address and abate Asbestos hazards, including a requirement that each facility owner must provide written notification to DES and the local health officer at least ten (10) working days before any building

demolition activity occurs. This notification is required for all building demolition projects regardless of the amount of Asbestos present, and even when no Asbestos is present (See Notification Section below). The health officer should be familiar with these requirements and provide information to residents and contractors whenever possible. For any complaints or concerns about Asbestos during building renovation and/or demolition projects, the health officer should call the N.H. Department of Environmental Services immediately at (603) 271-1370. Since the legal requirements can be complex, health officers are encouraged to contact the N.H. Department of Environmental Services for all inquiries.

Health Officers are also required during their inspection of school buildings within their town to verify that the school has a current Asbestos AHERA Inspection Report onsite for each building built before 1989. An update to the AHERA inspection is required of the school district every three years.

BACKGROUND

Asbestos, used commercially since 1870, is a naturally occurring mineral that became popular due to its many uses and resistance to heat. Approximately 80% of all homes built or remodeled between 1945 and 1978 contain some kind of Asbestos material. Asbestos is commonly found in heating system insulation, vinyl floor tiles and sheet flooring, roofing paper and shingles, cement siding shingles, and a variety of other products used in the construction of buildings. Because Asbestos is a known human carcinogen, the Federal government attempted to ban its use in the 1970's. The ban, however, was overturned and asbestos containing building materials are still available on the market today.

The greatest potential for exposure to Asbestos fibers now occurs when Asbestos-containing building materials are disturbed during either renovations or demolitions. State laws and regulations were promulgated to address this potential hazard. These rules require that all building owners, including homeowners and schools, and contractors take specific steps to identify and address Asbestos hazards in structures prior to beginning any work that might disturb Asbestos containing materials.

ASBESTOS REMOVAL DURING BUILDING RENOVATION & DEMOLITION

Inspection - Identifying the presence of Asbestos in a building is not always easy. A thorough inspection must be conducted for the presence of Asbestos-containing materials prior to any renovation or demolition project (per the requirements in Env-A 1804.01). A person accredited in the identification of Asbestos containing materials *must* conduct the inspection. If Asbestos is found and will be disturbed during any renovation or repair work, it must be removed properly and disposed of at an approved facility. Likewise, all Asbestos must be removed *prior* to any building demolition project. In most cases, Asbestos abatement activities must be performed by a licensed abatement contractor in accordance with the requirements in Env-A 1800.

Lists of accredited Asbestos inspectors, licensed abatement contractors, and approved disposal facilities can be obtained by calling the N.H. Department of Environmental Services at (603) 271-1370, or on-line at www.des.nh.gov (look for “Asbestos Management” on the A to Z list).

Notification: - Each facility owner must provide written notification to DES and the local health officer at least ten (10) working days before any building demolition activity occurs. This notification is required for all building demolition projects regardless of the amount of Asbestos present, and even when no Asbestos is present.

Written notification is required at least ten (10) working days prior to any Asbestos abatement activity conducted as part of **renovation work** only if the abatement involves greater than 10 linear feet, or 25 square feet of Asbestos containing materials. No notification is required for renovations if the amount of Asbestos containing materials is less than this, or if there is no Asbestos containing materials present that will be disturbed during the renovation.

A special Demolition/Renovation Notification Form must be used for the written notification. A notification fee may be required depending on the amount of Asbestos being removed. The forms can be obtained from the N.H. Department of Environmental Services at (603) 271-1370, or on-line at www.des.nh.gov (look for “Asbestos Management” on the A to Z list).

ASBESTOS IN SCHOOLS

[The Asbestos Hazard Emergency Response Act \(AHERA\)](#) and its regulations require public school districts and non-profit schools including charter schools and schools affiliated with religious institutions to:

- Inspect their schools for asbestos-containing building material
- Prepare management plans and to take action to prevent or reduce asbestos hazards

These legal requirements are founded on the principle of "in-place" management of asbestos-containing material. Removal of these materials is not usually necessary unless the material is severely damaged or will be disturbed by a building demolition or renovation project.

Personnel working on asbestos activities in schools must be trained and accredited in accordance with [The Asbestos Model Accreditation Plan](#). In addition, if removal of asbestos during renovation is warranted, or school buildings will be demolished, public school districts and non-profit schools must comply with the [Asbestos National Emissions Standards for Hazardous Air Pollutants \(NESHAP\)](#).

ASBESTOS IN THE HOME

Many homeowners have Asbestos containing materials in their homes. To properly identify these materials, homeowners should have an inspection performed by a qualified Asbestos inspector. Any Asbestos-containing building material that is in good condition and will not be disturbed should be left alone. However, if the material is deteriorating, or will be disturbed during renovation or demolition, it must be

removed. Homeowners in single family, owner occupied homes may do the work themselves provided they will not be selling the home within six months, and they must package and dispose of the waste properly. Health officers should encourage homeowners to use extreme caution when dealing with Asbestos containing materials, and should urge them to consider using a licensed Asbestos abatement contractor for most removal projects.

LOCAL ORDINANCES

State law allows town ordinances to be passed in order to have more local control over Asbestos issues. Such ordinances can provide authority for the local health officer to order abatement in a building, or cease an abatement project. For information on enacting local ordinances contact the New Hampshire Municipal Association at (603) 224-7447.

For more information contact:

NH Department of Environmental Services
Air Resources Division
Asbestos Management and Control Program
29 Hazen Drive, P.O. Box 95
Concord, New Hampshire 03302-0095
603-271-1370

www.des.nh.gov (look for Asbestos Management on the A to Z list)