

Asbestos

Background

Asbestos is a naturally-occurring mineral in our environment known to cause chronic health problems

Asbestos can be found in many building materials, friction products (like brake pads), and heat-resistant fabrics

Asbestos fibers can be liberated into the air through degradation of products over time or through demolition or remodeling projects

Asbestos fibers can enter the body through inhalation of particles in the air, and fibers may remain in the lung indefinitely

Health Risk

Adverse health effects are generally seen after long-term and high level exposure, as may occur in asbestos work environments

Chronic high level exposure can cause asbestosis (lung scarring), pleural plaques (changes in the membrane of the lung) and cancer of the lung and of membrane of the lung

Children are rarely exposed to occupational levels associated with adverse health effects in workers

There are no tests to tell if a child has been exposed: a chest x-ray shows only lung changes from long-term exposure, and is not appropriate in children

Response

Prevention of exposure to asbestos is the best way to avoid related health effects

Be aware of exposure sources, such as damaged ceilings in homes, and waste and demolition sites: remediate according to AHERA standards

Avoid tobacco smoke and help family members to quit: tobacco smoke multiplies the risk of harm from asbestos

Wet mop, wet dust and ventilate your home to minimize accumulation and inhalation of asbestos fibers and other particulate matter

Instructions for User

A message map delivers three key messages on a particular topic (top row, in yellow), each with three supporting statements (column below each key message, in blue). The key messages provide succinct Background, Health Risk and Response to the topic.

A message map is intended to guide a discussion of health risks and responsive actions pertaining to the topic. It does not represent an exhaustive resource for information on the topic. The presenter is expected to tailor the depth and pacing of information delivery to the needs of the recipient. At the recipient's request, the presenter is expected to bring his/her expertise to the topic and link the discussion to other resources available to the recipient. Some suggested sources of further information are listed below.

Risk communication is a science-based approach for communicating effectively and accurately to diverse audiences in situations that are high-concern, high-stress, emotionally charged, and/or highly controversial. Its purpose is to enhance knowledge and understanding, build trust and credibility, encourage constructive dialogue, produce appropriate levels of concern, and provide guidance on appropriate protective behavior and actions following a crisis incident. Although much about risk communication involves elements of common sense, its principles are supported by a considerable body of scientific research.

Covello V (Center for Risk Communication), Minamyer S, Clayton K (U.S. EPA National Homeland Security Research Center). Effective Risk and Crisis Communication During Water Security Emergencies. Reston, VA: U.S. EPA: March 2007. 72 p. Work Assignment: 4-94. Contract No.: 68-C-02-067.

For more information on asbestos:

Mount Sinai Pediatric Environmental Health Specialty Unit (PEHSU)
<http://goo.gl/dLlXXJ>

New York State Department of Health
<http://www.health.ny.gov/environmental/indoors/asbestos/>

Environmental Protection Agency
<http://www2.epa.gov/asbestos>

Agency for Toxic Substances & Disease Registry (ATSDR)
<http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/toxprofiles/tp.asp?id=30&tid=4>

Asbestos Hazard Emergency Response Act (AHERA)
<http://www2.epa.gov/asbestos/asbestos-laws-and-regulations>