

Asbestos Awareness

As an L&I Inspector, you have a risk of encountering disturbed Asbestos Containing Material (ACM) during your inspections. As such, you need to have a basic awareness of asbestos, the potential sources of ACM, and what steps to follow if you encounter potentially airborne asbestos.

This Crew Talk is not a replacement for the half-day Asbestos Awareness course that all Inspectors are required to attend. It is designed to summarize and compliment the training.

What is asbestos?

Asbestos is a strong, fire-resistant mineral fibre. In the past, asbestos was used as insulation against heat or noise and for fire protection. It was also added to materials such as cement and plaster to give them more structural strength.

How can you become exposed to asbestos?

Asbestos exposure primarily occurs through inhalation of airborne asbestos fibres. These fibres can become airborne when ACM is disturbed (e.g. through breaking, drilling, cutting, sawing, sanding, etc.).

Asbestos fibres can stay suspended in the air for hours and appear similar to dust.

Note: Asbestos does not pose a risk when it is encased in other materials and not disturbed!

What are the health effects of asbestos exposure?

Airborne asbestos fibres can cause serious health problems when inhaled. People who become ill from asbestos are usually those who are exposed to it on a regular basis, most often in a job where they work directly with the material or through substantial environmental contact. Research has shown that smoking, in conjunction with asbestos exposure, significantly increases the risk of lung cancer. The health effects of asbestos do not usually present themselves until 15-20 years after exposure.

There are three main diseases associated with asbestos exposure: *asbestosis* (chronic lung disease), *mesothelioma* (cancer affecting the abdomen/chest) and *lung cancer*.

Where is asbestos commonly found?

Please refer to the *Potential Sources of Asbestos* diagram on the attached WorkSafeBC bulletin. Note that buildings and building materials constructed after 1987 will have a significantly lessened chance of having asbestos containing material present.

What do you do when you suspect ACM has been disturbed on a job site?

The only method of positively identifying ACM is through microscopic analysis. For the most part, this information will not be available to you, and as such, you will have to make a determination based on knowledge you have gained through education and training (this Crew Talk, the *Potential Sources of Asbestos* diagram, and the half-day Asbestos Awareness training).

If you observe ACM that has been disturbed:

1. Stop the inspection and leave the site.
2. Advise that you will not complete the inspection until proof of professional clean-up, removal or encapsulation can be produced by the homeowner/contractor.
3. You have the right to report violations of the *Occupational Health & Safety Regulation* to WorkSafeBC. To report call 1-888-621-SAFE (7233). Note, if other workers are present that could be exposed, call WorkSafeBC and advise of the situation immediately.

If you are unsure if airborne asbestos fibres are present, it is best to err on the side of caution. Stop the inspection until more information is available or the situation has been remedied.

If you observe ACM in poor condition, but currently it is not a risk of exposure, advise the homeowner/contractor of what you have noticed. Take an educational role - advise them that WorkSafeBC has resources and information that can assist in properly dealing with the situation.

IMPORTANT!

Report all incidents of exposure or potential exposure to your supervisor, who will document the incident and take any other necessary steps. If you feel you have had an "exposure" you may also want to file a WorkSafeBC "information only" claim for record purposes.

Questions?

If you have any questions on this Crew Talk, please speak to your supervisor.