

Asbestos Safety Information for Building Occupants

What is asbestos?

Asbestos is a group of naturally occurring mineral fibres that were widely used throughout the 20th century because of their strength, durability, and resistance to heat, fire, and chemicals. These properties made asbestos a popular material in construction, manufacturing, and transportation, particularly for insulation and fireproofing. In Canada, asbestos and asbestos-containing products were prohibited in 2018, although asbestos can still be found in many buildings constructed or renovated prior to the 1990s.

Where asbestos may be found in buildings

Asbestos can be found in a wide variety of building materials; some common examples include:

- Pipe, boiler, and duct insulation
- Ceiling tiles and sprayed fireproofing
- Drywall joint compound and plaster
- Vinyl floor tiles and backing
- Cement products and transite panels.

Is asbestos dangerous for occupants?

Asbestos poses little to no risk to building occupants when it's left undamaged and undisturbed. Asbestos becomes a health risk when fibres become airborne and are inhaled. The material itself is not inherently dangerous, but the condition it's in and what you do with it determines the risk.

Breathing asbestos fibres can cause serious illnesses, including:

- Asbestosis
- Lung cancer
- Mesothelioma

These diseases often develop 15–40+ years after exposure, and symptoms may not appear for decades.

What occupants should and should not do

✓ What you SHOULD do

- Leave walls, ceilings, flooring, and insulation undisturbed
- Report damage, deterioration, or debris (e.g., crumbling ceiling tiles, damaged pipe insulation)
- Follow posted signs and barriers during maintenance or construction activities
- Cooperate with temporary relocations or access restrictions during asbestos work

✗ What you should NOT do

- Drill, cut, sand, scrape, or fasten into walls or ceilings
- Remove ceiling tiles or floor tiles
- Perform repairs, renovations, or installations yourself
- Enter restricted work areas or remove warning signs

How Ontario law protects occupants

Under the **Occupational Health and Safety Act** and **Ontario Regulation 278/05**, building owners must:

- Identify asbestos-containing materials in buildings
- Maintain an asbestos management program
- Ensure asbestos is kept in good condition or safely removed
- Use trained workers and approved procedures for any asbestos work

Asbestos work must be classified (Type 1, 2, or 3), with increasing precautions, barriers, and air controls for higher-risk activities.

What happens during asbestos work

If asbestos-related maintenance or removal is occurring, occupants may notice:

- Warning signs and sealed work areas
- Negative-air machines with HEPA filtration
- Workers wearing protective clothing and respirators
- Restricted access or temporary relocations

These measures are mandatory safety controls designed to protect occupants and workers.

What to do if you are concerned

If you believe asbestos may be damaged or work is being done unsafely:

1. Leave the area if dust or debris is present
2. Report concerns to building management, facilities, or your supervisor
3. If unresolved, concerns can be reported to the [Department of Environmental Health and Safety](#)

Key reassurance for occupants

- Simply being in a building that contains asbestos does not mean you are at risk
- Risk is linked to disturbance, not presence
- Ontario law places responsibility on owners and employers, not occupants to manage asbestos safely

Official Ontario resources

- [Asbestos in the workplace – Ontario.ca](#)
- [Ontario Regulation 278/05 – Asbestos](#)