

Asbestos Awareness and Removal Procedures During Flood Clean Up

Many homes built before 1980 contain asbestos in old floor tiles, ceiling tiles, roof shingles and flashing, siding, insulation (around boilers, ducts, pipes, sheeting, fireplaces), pipe cement, and joint compound used on seams between pieces of sheetrock. Some newer houses may also contain asbestos. When asbestos-containing materials are disturbed, the asbestos can break down into very fine fibers. When these fibers are inhaled, they can cause serious diseases such as lung cancer, mesothelioma and asbestosis. There is no known safe level of asbestos exposure. Because of this health threat, any flood damaged materials that may contain asbestos must be handled appropriately and be properly contained and disposed of.

Structures are regulated by West Virginia law and required to have an asbestos inspection before disturbing any building materials. However, due to the extensive damage caused by the recent floods, homeowners may need to remove flooded materials that may contain asbestos from their homes, and condemned structures that pose an imminent danger may require immediate demolition. We recognize that following the normally required asbestos inspection and removal procedures may not be possible in these circumstances. However, structures that have been identified for demolition but do not pose an imminent danger to public safety should follow normal procedures.

The West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources (WVDDHR), Bureau for Public Health (BPH), Office of Environmental Health Services (OEHS) recommends that you hire a licensed asbestos abatement contractor to avoid possible contamination and exposure. A list of licensed asbestos inspectors and contractors is available on BPH's Asbestos Compliance Program website at www.wvdhhr.org/rtia/licensing.asp, or you can also call (304) 356-4276 to obtain a written list. If you must repair damage in your home, recommended work practices when removing materials that may contain asbestos are listed below. These practices can help minimize fiber exposure. If you are not comfortable with these work practices, please contact a licensed asbestos contractor.

The following are the minimum precautions that should be taken when handling materials that may contain asbestos:

- The work area should be sealed off from the rest of the building. Plastic sheeting and duct tape may be used. Take great care not to track asbestos dust into other areas of the building.
- Use an approved NIOSH/MSHA respirator for protection against asbestos fibers. Also, disposable coveralls, gloves, hats and other protective clothing should be used. Dispose of all of this equipment immediately after using it.
- When working with asbestos-containing material, wet it with a hand sprayer. The sprayer should provide a fine mist, and the material should be thoroughly dampened but not dripping wet. Wet fibers do not float in the air as readily as dry fibers and will be easier to clean up. The addition of a small amount of a low-sudsing dish or laundry detergent will improve the penetration of the water into the material and reduce the amount of water needed.
- Do not break materials into small pieces. While it is easier to remove and handle small pieces, you are more likely to release asbestos fibers if you break the material. Pipe insulation was usually installed in preformed blocks, and it is best to remove these in complete pieces.
- Place any material to be removed in plastic trash bags and dispose of it in the proper landfill. For disposal information, call the Department of Environmental Protection at (304) 926-0499. Take care not to break the bag and double-bag if necessary.
- After the material is removed, the area should be thoroughly cleaned with wet mops, wet rags or sponges. Repeat the cleaning procedure a second time. Wetting will help to reduce the chance that the fibers are aerosolized. Again, see that no asbestos material is tracked into other areas. Dispose of the mop heads, rags and sponges in the trash bags with the removed materials. Make sure to completely clean any non-disposable items that may have come into contact with asbestos.

For additional information or questions, please contact the WVDHHR, BPH, OEHS at (304) 558-2981.

