

Eco-Tip for 1-7-17

Waste Reduction or Management for Asbestos in Flooring

By David Goldstein, VC PWA, IWMD

Asbestos is scary because the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency says there is no safe level of exposure, and asbestos is present in a wide variety of older building materials. Even a single exposure can cause a life threatening disease.

In general, asbestos in building materials does not pose a threat in your home unless it is disturbed. However, recent events are leading to a flurry of debris removal and home improvement projects, creating many opportunities for these disturbances to send asbestos fibers airborne. People nearby can accidentally inhale the thin fibers, which may lodge themselves into the lining of a lung or abdominal cavity.

Because the human body cannot easily expel these fibers, they can cause tumors and eventually develop into mesothelioma – a deadly cancer.

Replacement of flooring is one common way homeowners come across a potential asbestos exposure problem. According to Asbestos.com, the online portal of patient advocacy organization The Mesothelioma Center, vinyl flooring and wallpaper used in construction before 1980 often contains asbestos.

Adhesives for these and other building materials also may contain asbestos. The US EPA website lists 18 products in which asbestos is still not banned, and 10 of these are building materials. Cutting, sanding, removing, or cleaning the dust or ash of asbestos containing products can expose people to carcinogenic fibers.

Asbestos items should be removed only by a licensed abatement professional, and this can be expensive, so homeowners often want to test materials before accepting the added expense of treating discards with the highest levels of caution.

Some asbestos testing kits, such as the \$12.99 kit available at Ace Hardware stores, appear to be inexpensive. However, these are just for collection of samples to be mailed to labs. The small print on the front of the kit's packaging shows there is an additional \$40 lab charge required for mailing results, which are available four to seven business days after samples are received by the lab.

Working with a local test company offers a benefit not available by mail-in offers, according to Nate Seward, who has owned Criterion Environmental of Ventura since 2002. When a local company like Criterion collects the sample and conducts the test, their certification includes "third party neutrality," which Seward says can be crucial for real estate transactions and other cases where a future occupant wants reassurance. Results are generally available within 24 hours.

With flooring, sometimes the best course of action is to lay a new floor directly on top of a suspected asbestos-containing floor, rather than removing the old floor. The main challenge to this approach is ensuring floor levels are not too high for inward swinging doors. Another potential drawback is the possibility of a future occupant of the home not suspecting asbestos- containing materials under a newer floor.

More information: <https://www.epa.gov/asbestos/us-federal-bans-asbestos>

www.criterionenv.com

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