

Asbestos

By Dru Sahai, M.Sc.(A), ROH



Asbestos is the #1 cause of occupation-related death for people who have worked in Ontario construction.

If you work in the building trades, then you have probably been exposed to asbestos. Exposure can cause a number of deadly diseases. They can take a long time to develop—up to 40 years.

For example, electricians, insulators, carpenters, pipefitters, and drywallers who disturbed asbestos-containing material during their normal, everyday work are today suffering from asbestos-related diseases such as

- lung cancer
- mesothelioma (cancer of the lining of the chest and/or abdomen)
- asbestosis (scarring of the lungs).

If you develop an asbestos-related disease you may die from it. There are no reliable cures for these diseases. Protect yourself.

How do I know if a material contains asbestos?

The building owner must produce a report stating whether any material that you are likely to contact contains asbestos.

The report must show the location of the asbestos-containing material. The owner must provide the report to all contractors bidding on the job.

In most cases, you cannot see whether a material contains asbestos from its appearance. But, if you are working in an older building you should suspect that there is asbestos in

- sprayed-on fireproofing
- pipe and boiler insulation
- loose fill insulation
- cement products
- vermiculite insulation
- vinyl tiles
- mastic
- roofing felts
- acoustical plaster
- drywall compound
- ceiling tiles
- gaskets.

As well, asbestos is still used today in some products such as cement pipe. Asbestos products are **not** banned in Ontario.

What should I do if I discover suspicious material while I'm working?

- ✓ Stop work immediately.
- ✓ Inform your supervisor.
- ✓ Avoid exposure to all dust.
- ✓ Keep everyone out of the area.

The constructor must now inform

- ✓ the Ministry of Labour (416-314-5421, or 1-800-991-7454)
- ✓ the owner, all contractors, and the joint health and safety committee (JHSC).

No work is allowed unless

- ✓ the material is tested for asbestos and the results show less than 0.1% asbestos, or
- ✓ the work proceeds as if the material contains asbestos (using all the controls and protection required).

More information about controlling asbestos exposure is contained in CSAO's manual *Asbestos: Controls for Construction, Renovation, and Demolition* (DS037), available free on www.csa.org. Check out the web site to learn about CSAO's training programs about asbestos. ■

Dust and silica

By Lawrence A. Kurtz, MSM, DOHS, ROH

Dust on construction sites can contain wood dust, fibres, soil, concrete, and silica. On some sites, it can even contain asbestos.

What can dust do to me?

Dust can cause bronchitis and asthma. Silica (see more information below) can cause silicosis and lung cancer.

It takes a long-time for the diseases to show up, and there is no cure for some of them.

Workers affected by silicosis (or lung dust disease) can have a higher risk of heart disease, respiratory failure, or tuberculosis.

What is silica?

Crystalline silica is a component of rock and sand. That means silica is contained in such things as

- concrete dust
- road dust
- demolition dust
- marble and stone
- drywall taping compound
- grout
- mortar
- refractory ceramic fibres.

If we breathe the small particles of airborne silica dust into our lungs, they can cause lung damage called silicosis or lung cancer.

Silica dust may also contain limestone, which can irritate and dry out the skin.

What activities make silica dust?

Hazardous activities include

- stone cutting
- grinding
- chipping
- sanding
- polishing
- dry mixing
- abrasive blasting
- sweeping.

Who is most at risk for silica-related disease?

- Road workers
- Concrete workers
- Restoration workers
- Demolition workers
- Terrazzo workers
- Bricklayers
- Drywall tapers
- Insulators
- Apprentices.

How can I control silica?

- ✓ Follow the Ministry of Labour's guideline *Silica on Construction Projects*. Download it from



www.labour.gov.on.ca/english/hs/guidelines/silica/index.htm

- ✓ Train workers to recognize and control silica hazards.
- ✓ Substitute silica-free products for silica-containing products.
- ✓ Use local ventilation to contain dust.
- ✓ Use water to suppress dust.
- ✓ Use work practices, such as "wet sweeping" instead of dry sweeping, to minimize dust production.
- ✓ Take the wind into consideration when positioning workers. You don't want the wind blowing dust from one activity towards other workers.
- ✓ Wear appropriate respiratory protection.
- ✓ Wear appropriate clothing and wash your face and hands before eating, drinking, smoking, and going home. ■