

# Asbestos

## What is asbestos, and where is it found?

Asbestos is a natural mineral with unusual qualities. It is strong enough to resist high temperatures, chemical attack and wear. A poor conductor, it insulates well against heat and electricity.

For half a century, until the early 1990s in some cases, asbestos was used in office buildings, public buildings, homes and schools. It insulated hot water heating systems, and was put into walls and ceilings as insulation against fire and sound.

Asbestos has also been found in many products around the house. It has been used in:

- shingles and felt for roofing
- exterior siding
- pipe and boiler covering
- compounds and cement, such as drywall mud, caulk, putty, roof patching, furnace cement and driveway coating
- wallboard; textured ceiling spackle, acoustical ceiling tiles and plaster
- vinyl floor tiles
- Spray on fire-proofing and insulation
- Loose-fill vermiculite insulation may contain traces of “amphibole” asbestos.

Frequent or prolonged exposure to asbestos fibres may still bring health risks. This can happen with the release of fibres into the air when asbestos-containing products break down, either through deterioration as they age or when they are cut. People can put themselves at risk — often without realizing it.

## What are the Health Risks?

- **Asbestosis.** Asbestos causes scarring of lung tissue that eventually restricts one's ability to inhale.
- **Lung Cancer.** Asbestos increases the risk of lung cancer, especially in combination with exposure to tobacco smoke.
- **Mesothelioma.** Asbestos is thought to be the primary cause of this rare and deadly type of cancer of the lung lining and chest wall