

ASBESTOS IN THE HOME

This document is intended to assist homeowners who have questions about asbestos. This document relates only to single family homes or apartments with four or fewer living units. All other buildings are considered “facilities” and are subject to federal and state regulations. This document is not an interpretation of federal, state and/or local asbestos regulations. Questions about asbestos regulations should be addressed to the appropriate government agency.

What is asbestos?

Asbestos is a mineral mined from the earth. The raw mineral was typically broken apart into fibers that were subsequently added to manufactured products. Asbestos was used extensively in the United States from the 1940s through the 1970s and often was added to building materials. Asbestos still is used today, although not nearly as much as it was during its peak. (See charts at the end of this document.)

What health risks are associated with asbestos?

Human exposure to asbestos has been linked to several respiratory diseases. If asbestos-containing products are disturbed, the fibers may become airborne. Once airborne, the fibers may be inhaled into the lungs and may cause asbestos-related illness. The following diseases are associated with asbestos exposure:

- Lung cancer
- Mesothelioma – cancer of the lining of the lungs
- Asbestosis – scar tissue in the lungs

Long-term, chronic exposure to asbestos has been documented to result in the diseases listed above. However, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), any asbestos exposure may lead to asbestos-related illness.

What products contain asbestos?

Asbestos was commonly added to the following building products:*

- Floor tile
- Ceiling tile
- Plaster
- Sheetrock joint compound
- Shingles
- Transite siding and panels
- Pipe insulation
- Boiler insulation

*Note: This list is not all-inclusive. It has been estimated that asbestos was used in thousands of different products from the 1930s through the 1980s.

How can I determine if asbestos is present in a home?

There is only one way to determine if asbestos is present in a building material. That requires submitting a piece of the material to an accredited laboratory for microscopic analysis. Any material containing more than 1 percent asbestos is considered to be an “asbestos-containing material.” Legally, a homeowner may submit a sample of a material for laboratory analysis, although sampling should be done by a professional asbestos inspector. The North Dakota Department of Health has compiled a list of licensed asbestos contractors, which is available on the following website: <http://www.ndhealth.gov/AQ/IAQ/ASB/Asbestos%20Contractor%20List.pdf> .

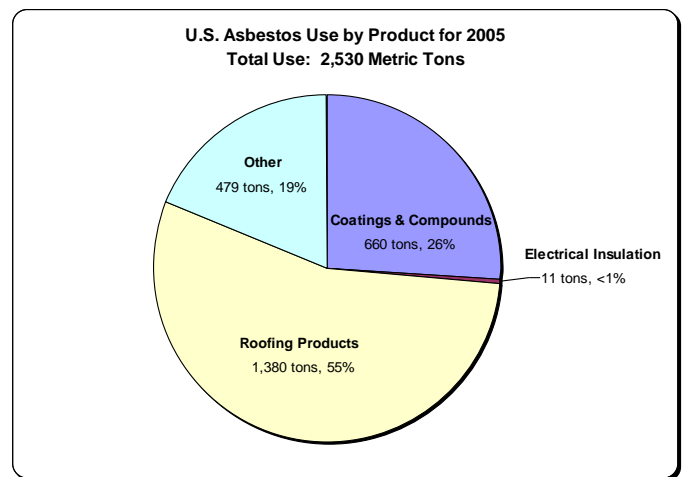
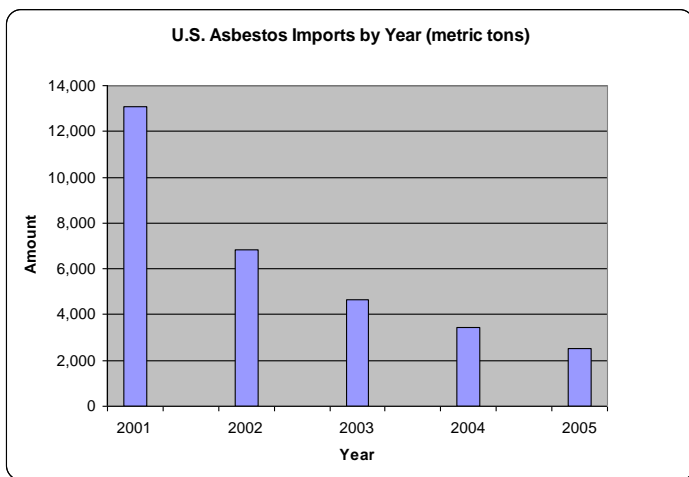
What if asbestos is discovered in a home?

If it is determined that asbestos is present in a home, it is recommended to leave the material alone. Materials in good condition that contain asbestos pose a low risk for harm as long as they are not disturbed. If an asbestos-containing material is in poor condition, steps should be taken to repair or replace that material. Repair and removal of asbestos-containing materials should be done only by professional asbestos contractors or by homeowners who have a good understanding of the proper way to remove those materials. Failure to appropriately handle asbestos-containing materials may lead to contamination in the home.

A renovation project in a home should be preceded by an asbestos inspection to determine which products, if any, contain asbestos. If asbestos is discovered, those materials should be avoided or properly removed prior to disturbing them during the renovation.

For more information about asbestos, please contact:

North Dakota Department of Health
Air Quality Division
Asbestos Control Program
918 E. Divide Ave., 2nd Floor
Bismarck, N.D. 58501-1947
Phone: 701.328.5188 or 701.476.4122
Fax: 701.328.5185
Website: www.ndhealth.gov/AQ/IAQ/ASB/



Data courtesy of the USGS