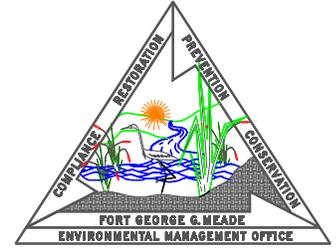




## FACTS ABOUT ASBESTOS



### WHAT IS ASBESTOS?

Asbestos is a group of naturally occurring fibrous mineral that is heat resistant and extremely durable fire retardant. During the post-World War II era, asbestos was used extensively in building materials because of its durability, strength, heat and resistant to corrosion, thermal insulating properties and fireproofing capability.

Homes built before the early 1980's may have asbestos in building materials such as pipe insulation, ceiling coverings, wallboard coverings, floor tiles or sheets rock, stove or furnace gaskets, HVAC flexible connectors or house shingles. Pipe insulation and floor tile are the main building materials containing asbestos at Fort Meade.

### WHEN IS ASBESTOS A PROBLEM?

When asbestos materials in good condition are left intact and undisturbed, they are not likely to release fibers into the air and do not pose a health risk. The mere presence of asbestos in a building does not mean that the health of building occupants is endangered. However, asbestos can become a health hazard when it degrades into airborne microscopic fibers that can be breathed into our lungs.

### HEALTH HAZARDS OF ASBESTOS

The main method of exposure to asbestos is through breathing airborne fiber particles. These particles can be so small that they are invisible and they can remain airborne for long periods of time. Inhalation of asbestos fibers is known to cause a chronic disease of the lungs that makes breathing progressively more difficult, and a cancer of the chest and abdominal membranes. Other cancers, primarily of the lungs and digestive tract, have been associated with exposure to asbestos. The asbestos related diseases usually occur in people who have worked with fairly high levels of asbestos for a long time and were not protected from breathing in the fibers. In general, the risk is likely to be negligible for building occupants where asbestos-containing material is present. There is no safe level of asbestos exposure.

### HANDLING ASBESTOS

Asbestos pipe insulation may be white or gray on the inside. It can be chalky, powder-like, or corrugated air cell (similar to the edge of a cardboard box). Asbestos pipe insulation may be found on hot water or steam pipes in crawl spaces, in utility rooms, in basements or in furnace rooms.

If asbestos is present or suspected to be present or suspected to be present, it is best to just leave it alone. Asbestos is a health risk only when fibers are released into the air and they are then inhaled. Avoid touching, hammering, puncturing, sanding, tearing or rubbing the surface with any object. These actions may potentially release fibers into the air.

If asbestos is damaged and falls to the floor, **DO NOT DRY SWEEP OR VACUUM IT UP.** The fibers are small enough to go through a regular vacuum filter. Vacuuming or sweeping will only put more fibers into the air. If the asbestos needs to be cleaned up immediately (emergency), wet mopping is an effective way to reduce fiber releases. The mop should be discarded after this as asbestos contaminated waste. **Removal or repair of asbestos is best left to a certified and trained worker.** If suspect asbestos containing materials is damaged a work order should be placed at the Work Control Desk for repairs.

Floor coverings, such as vinyl tile and sheets may contain a small amount of asbestos for strength. Fibers can be released through sanding, dry buffing, or breaking or pulverizing the tile into small pieces. Use soap and water, or other liquid cleaning detergent to clean tile or sheet floor coverings.

### GETTING MORE INFORMATION

If you have questions or would like more information about asbestos, please contact the Directorate of Public Works, Environmental Division at (301) 677-9648.

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