

## Identifying Hazardous Building Materials

Many older building materials on campus, such as plaster, pipe insulation, and flooring, among others, may contain asbestos. Likewise, painted surfaces in older buildings have the potential to contain lead.

Northwestern employees are not authorized to perform tasks that disturb asbestos or lead-containing materials unless they are trained and authorized, and a Safe Work Practice exists for the task.

Disturbing a material means cutting, drilling, sanding, or otherwise handling a material in a way that causes the material to break apart. Contacting materials that are in good condition (e.g., lifting an intact ceiling tile to access a ceiling cavity) is generally not considered a disturbance. If you are unsure whether a task will disturb a material, notify your supervisor.

Follow these guidelines to determine when building materials need to be tested or assumed to contain asbestos or lead before disturbing them.

### Asbestos

- Is the work a renovation (i.e., not routine maintenance or repairs)?
  - If so, a thorough asbestos inspection must always be performed, regardless of the age of the building.
  - Contact your supervisor or Environmental Health and Safety (EHS) to determine whether the materials involved have been tested or to coordinate an inspection.
- For maintenance and repair activities that disturb small amounts of building materials, follow the guidelines below.
  - In buildings built before 1981, always assume these materials contain asbestos unless they have been tested:
    - Thermal system insulation (e.g., pipe, duct, or boiler insulation)
    - Surfacing materials (e.g., plaster, spray-on fireproofing)
    - Vinyl and asphalt flooring material
  - In ALL buildings, regardless of the age of the building, always assume these materials contain asbestos unless they have been tested:
    - Ceiling tile glue pucks
    - Acoustical plaster
    - “Popcorn” ceiling plaster
    - Black flooring mastic
    - 9”x9” floor tiles
- Other materials, such as drywall, ceiling tiles, baseboards, and materials in newer buildings, are less likely to contain asbestos and do not need to be assumed to contain asbestos. However, EHS may have inspection results for such materials and can be contacted to verify.
- If you are unsure whether a material needs testing, contact your supervisor and/or EHS.

### Lead

Was the building built before 1978? If so, the painted surfaces must be assumed to contain lead unless they have been tested. Contact EHS to determine whether the surfaces have been tested.

Questions? Contact your supervisor or Environmental Health and Safety (EHS) at [ehs@northwestern.edu](mailto:ehs@northwestern.edu)