

Asbestos Awareness

While performing tasks here at Northwestern, you may come across asbestos-containing material (ACM), a potentially hazardous material if disturbed. As such, Northwestern has an Asbestos Management [program](#) to ensure the safety of you, your colleagues, and the community. It is important that you understand and recognize potential asbestos hazards in the workplace and avoid disturbing ACM to prevent exposure.

What is Asbestos?

Asbestos is the term used for six naturally occurring minerals used in commercial products from approximately 1900-1980 due to their strength, flexibility, low electrical conductivity, and resistance to heat and other chemicals. Asbestos has been banned in some products since 1989 by the Environmental Protection Agency. However, many old building materials, such as pipe insulation, floor tiles, plaster, and fire doors, still contain asbestos today.

ACM is divided into two categories: **friable** and **non-friable**. Friable asbestos is any ACM that can be crushed into powder using hand pressure. This is considered the most hazardous type of asbestos, as asbestos is only hazardous when the fibers are airborne. Intact ACM does not pose a hazard unless it is disturbed.

Tips for Success When Talking to Your Team

Preparation is Key: Keep the topic relevant to your work. Work with your team to review potential asbestos exposure hazards in your work areas and procedures to stay safe.

Stay Positive: Keep the focus on what can be done to create a safe workplace instead of focusing on what has gone wrong in the past.

Share a Story, Ask for a Story: Storytelling is a powerful method to convey information. Stories from your employees make the topic even more relatable.

Asbestos-Related Illnesses

Chronic exposure to asbestos can lead to the following illnesses, each of which take 10 – 40 years to develop:

- **Lung cancer** is a disease caused by uncontrolled cell division in the lungs. It is the leading cause of cancer death in the U.S.
- **Asbestosis** is a chronic, non-cancerous respiratory disease that impairs the elasticity of the lung tissue.
- **Mesothelioma** is a rare form of cancer of the lining of the lung or abdomen cavity.

Did you know?

Asbestos exposure and smoking are a very dangerous combination. Asbestos exposure increases the risk of lung cancer by 5 times, and smoking increases the risk by 10 times. The combination of smoking and asbestos exposure increases the risk of lung cancer by 50 times!

Minimizing Exposure Risk

Below are some helpful tips to prevent asbestos exposure:

- ✓ Always obey asbestos warning signs.
- ✓ Never perform the following activities on known (or suspected) ACM – drilling, hammering, cutting, sawing, sanding, and dry sweeping.
- ✓ You cannot tell if a material contains asbestos simply by looking at it. ACM must be identified by a qualified inspector. If you are unsure if a material contains asbestos, contact your supervisor or ehs@northwestern.edu.
- ✓ Never remove ACM on your own; only qualified licensed vendors may abate and dispose of ACM.



Learn more: Complete [Asbestos Awareness](#) online training.

Report all injuries: [Online](#) or call (847) 491-5582.

Safety at Home

Asbestos may also be found in homes, and it's important that you follow the same safe work practices to keep you and your family safe.

- **Get a professional inspection.** Hire a qualified asbestos inspector to assess your home for any potential ACM. If found, asbestos must only be removed by licensed professionals.
- **Educate family members.** Ensure everyone in your household is aware of the potential presence of asbestos and the precautions to avoid exposure, such as not disturbing potential ACM (e.g., pipe insulation, plaster, or spray-on insulation) and identifying damaged ACM.

For Additional Information Contact Environmental Health and Safety at ehs@northwestern.edu.