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# Asbestos exposure in demolition and renovation

## OHS information for work site parties

This resource provides information on asbestos, its potential harmful effects, and Alberta's asbestos-related requirements pertaining to demolition and renovation.

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### KEY INFORMATION

- Asbestos can be released during demolition, renovation and disposal activities, and can have adverse health effects on unprotected workers.
- Before demolishing a building or other structure, employers are required to remove any materials that may potentially release asbestos fibres.
  - An Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) allowance issued in January 2023 provides flexibility in meeting this requirement in some specific situations.
- If you suspect you have been exposed to asbestos at work, you should report it to the OHS Contact Centre and contact your doctor.
- Waste that could contain asbestos must be transported and disposed of properly in accordance with provincial and federal legislation.

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### What is asbestos?

Asbestos is a group of naturally occurring fibrous minerals with unique physical characteristics, including extraordinary tensile strength, poor heat conduction, and flame resistance. For these reasons, asbestos was often used in a wide range of building products. However, it is now recognized that exposure to asbestos can cause a variety of harmful health effects.

During demolition and renovation, asbestos fibres may be released if building materials containing asbestos are disturbed. Unprotected workers can then be exposed to the asbestos by breathing in these fibres.

If a building was built before 1990, there is a higher risk that some materials used in its construction may contain asbestos.

### What are the health effects of exposure to asbestos?

Inhaled asbestos fibres can accumulate in the lungs, causing scarring and inflammation. As the scarring and inflammation

progresses, it can affect breathing and lead to serious and irreversible health problems.

For example, exposure to asbestos can cause lung cancer, mesothelioma, and cancer of the larynx or ovaries, as well as other non-cancerous lung disorders like asbestosis and pleural disease.

### Where could you be exposed to asbestos during demolition work?

Many building products may contain asbestos, including:

- Ceiling tiles.
- Drywall mud.
- Exterior stucco and siding.
- Furnace or boiler duct tape and wrap.
- Light fixtures.
- Mechanical insulation.
- Pipe insulation.
- Plaster.
- Roofing materials.
- Vermiculite attic or block insulation.
- Vinyl asbestos floor tiles.
- Vinyl sheet flooring.

Some common ways workers can be exposed to asbestos when doing activities related to demolition or renovation are:

- Demolition of asbestos-containing structures using heavy equipment.
- Transfer, dumping, or disposal of waste that contains asbestos.
- Hand demolition of structures or materials that contain asbestos.
- Site-cleaning activities where asbestos has been disturbed.
- Renovation projects where demolition (controlled or uncontrolled) has been conducted.
- Handling of equipment and materials contaminated with asbestos.

Before demolishing a building or other structure, employers are required to remove any materials that could potentially release asbestos fibres. Some municipalities require proof that this has been completed before they will issue a demolition or development permit.

## Demolishing structurally compromised buildings without first removing asbestos

There are some situations where it is unsafe to remove asbestos before demolishing a building. An OHS allowance issued in January 2023 allows demolition of a building, in some specific situations, without first removing materials with the potential to release asbestos fibres, as long as the terms and conditions in the allowance are followed.

### IMPORTANT

This OHS allowance applies only if a professional engineer has certified that the structural integrity of the building is (or may become) compromised due to abatement activities such that it would create a hazard to workers.

OHS allowances enable work site parties to vary from specific provisions of the OHS Code, and gives them the flexibility to either follow the original rule in the OHS Code or follow the allowance. To learn more about this particular asbestos-related allowance and its terms and conditions, see the [OHS allowance for demolition of structurally compromised buildings without first removing asbestos](#).

## How can asbestos exposure be controlled?

The removal of asbestos-containing materials prior to demolition by a trained and competent worker is a legislated requirement. The [Alberta Asbestos Abatement Manual](#) outlines best practices, explains appropriate controls, and references applicable OHS legislation for asbestos abatement in Alberta.

## What are the requirements for disposing of asbestos-containing waste?

Asbestos in Alberta must be transported in accordance with the provincial *Dangerous Goods Transportation and Handling Act* and Dangerous Goods Transportation and Handling Regulation. Asbestos disposal must be done in accordance with Alberta's [Guidelines for the Disposal of Asbestos Waste](#) and can only be sent only to landfills that are approved to accept asbestos-containing waste.

## What should you do if you suspect exposure to asbestos in the workplace?

If you suspect that a demolition or renovation project is resulting in worker exposure to asbestos, call the Alberta OHS Contact Centre toll-free at 1-866-415-8690.

If you suspect you have been exposed to asbestos at work, you should report the incident to the OHS Contact Centre and tell your doctor. Most people do not show any signs or symptoms resulting from asbestos-related disease for at least 10 years, and medical monitoring can assess the health effects of exposure to asbestos long after the exposure has occurred. Only a doctor can assess whether a health problem is caused by exposure to asbestos.

## Contact us

### OHS Contact Centre

Anywhere in Alberta

- 1-866-415-8690

Edmonton and surrounding area

- 780-415-8690

Deaf or hard of hearing (TTY)

- 1-800-232-7215 (Alberta)
- 780-427-9999 (Edmonton)

### Notify OHS of health and safety concerns

[alberta.ca/file-complaint-online.aspx](https://alberta.ca/file-complaint-online.aspx)

Call the OHS Contact Centre if you have concerns that involve immediate danger to a person on a work site.

### Report a workplace incident to OHS

[alberta.ca/ohs-complaints-incidents.aspx](https://alberta.ca/ohs-complaints-incidents.aspx)

### Website

[alberta.ca/ohs](https://alberta.ca/ohs)

## Get copies of the OHS Act, Regulation and Code

### Alberta King's Printer

[alberta.ca/alberta-kings-printer.aspx](https://alberta.ca/alberta-kings-printer.aspx)

### OHS

[alberta.ca/ohs-act-regulation-code.aspx](https://alberta.ca/ohs-act-regulation-code.aspx)

## For more information

Alberta Asbestos Abatement Manual (ASB001)

[ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/asb001](https://ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/asb001)

Approved asbestos training agencies (ASB002)

[ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/asb002](https://ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/asb002)

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