

Identifying Asbestos in your home.

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Dr. Don Pinchin of the Pinchin Group in Mississauga, Ontario is an expert in asbestos abatement who usually works on large commercial projects. We got him to show us what forms of asbestos we might still find in our homes, and just how dangerous they might be.

The key message was that if it is not friable (meaning likely to fall apart and create dust), you don't really have to worry about it. If it is getting into the air, from bumping into it, or may get into the air during upcoming demolition for renovations, then you must do something about it. Approaches range from covering it up with a new floor, a new ceiling, or a box-like enclosure -- to having a professional come in and take it all out in such a manner as to protect the workers, the house and its occupants.

Some linoleum tiles prior to 1982 did have asbestos in them. They were quite rigid and are not a danger unless you start to break them up.

A lot of heat shields that look like concrete sheet board were made largely of asbestos. Again, if you do not break or saw them, they are not a problem to leave put. Or you can even remove them carefully yourself. Remember, asbestos is not toxic to the touch -- you just don't want to get any into your lungs.

Some old plaster walls used asbestos as a strengthener -- they show up as short gray coloured fibers in the plaster (long dark fibers are horse hair, not asbestos). Breaking off a small piece to check will not harm you. It is getting quantities of it in your lungs that is the danger. If you think you might have asbestos in the plaster, leave the demolition to an asbestos abatement team, despite the cost.

Some ceiling stipple before 1982 used asbestos. If it appears to have very small fibers in it, have it tested.

Sheet style floor coverings often had backings that were made up of up to 80% asbestos prior to 1980. It was a dull gray paper-like material that is now stuck to the floor. The top patterned surface is not a problem, but ripping it up always creates dust and is very dangerous. Again, consult an expert or a laboratory before ripping up that old floor. On the other hand you can always confine the asbestos by going right over the flooring. Make sure you don't create any dust.

Most old hot water heating systems used asbestos in a cardboard-like form to wrap the pipes, and in a paste form to seal corners of the pipes and the boiler itself. If it is in good shape, leave it. If it is getting banged around, box it in to confine it -- or have it removed. Do not try to remove materials containing friable asbestos yourself.

Dr. Pinchin can be contacted in Mississauga, Ontario. For other asbestos abatement contacts go to the Industry Canada website www.strategis.gc.ca, look in the "Company Directories" section and then under the "Company Capabilities" search for "Asbestos".

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