

Asbestos: Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What is asbestos and where does it come from?

A: Asbestos is a naturally occurring mineral mined from the ground.

Q. Where can asbestos be found?

A: Asbestos can be found in many older construction materials and vehicle products, including thermal systems insulation, spray-on fireproofing, caulks, sealants, ceiling and floor tiles, roofing material and brake linings, just to name a few. It was regularly used because of its strength and its ability to resist heat and corrosion, but its use has been severely restricted in the last several decades after certain health risks were discovered.

Q. What health risks are associated with asbestos and how does asbestos become a hazard?

A. Asbestos becomes hazardous only when fibers are released into the air. For this reason, asbestos-containing building material (ACBM) such as pipe insulation, spray-on fireproofing, or anything friable (meaning it can be crushed into a powder by hand) is more of a risk than items like floor tiles, caulks, or sealants. Asbestos does not pose a risk simply through its presence in older building materials, but care must be taken when those materials might be disturbed, such as through construction. The health risks associated with asbestos include chronic lung disease and lung or other cancers.

Q. What triggers the District to abate asbestos?

A. If an area is being renovated and ACBM's will likely be disturbed, the District will have it abated. If asbestos becomes damaged beyond repair, the District also will have it abated.

Q. How does the District protect its students, staff and neighbors from airborne asbestos fibers during an abatement project?

A. All asbestos work done at Avoca follows strict safety mandates from the Illinois Department of Public Health and involves extensive planning, review and independent monitoring from trained environmental professionals. The District must notify the Illinois Department of Public Health and Cook County authorities at least 10 days prior to the start of any asbestos work. This notification must include a project design created by an IDPH licensed Professional Designer that identifies the location, amount and type of asbestos being removed; the project dates and times; the name of the contractor; and other specifics. The District must also contract with an independent Environmental Consultant. This Consultant is responsible for air monitoring of the project area and all adjoining areas outside the project area. These air samples are taken continually beginning before any abatement work (background samples), during the project and after the project is complete (clearance samples).

All work areas are protected by locked full-height plywood barriers. These barriers are clearly marked with signage warning people not to enter. Inside the actual work area, all ventilation equipment is taken out of service and multiple layers of polyurethane sheeting are applied to walls, floors and ceilings. The area is then put into a negative pressure via negative air machines to assure that even in the event of a leak, no materials could escape outside of the work area. These negative air machines run 24/7 starting before abatement and lasting until final air clearance is given.

After the asbestos is removed, every square inch of surface inside the containment area is washed. The area then sits for 12 hours and is washed again. This cleaning process happens three times. After the third time, a leaf blower is brought into the containment to stir the air and a final air sample is taken and read. Only after this extensive cleaning procedure is complete and the air sample verified does the contractor remove the barriers and return the space back to the District.

Q. Who can remove asbestos from a school?

A. Only Illinois Department of Public Health licensed asbestos workers are allowed to maintain or remove asbestos.