

KDHE Recommends Precautions for Removing Debris that May Contain Asbestos

The Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) is reminding residents and individuals in storm-damaged areas to take precautions against possibly being exposed to asbestos while removing and disposing of debris.

Asbestos was used extensively in construction and building materials. People can be exposed to asbestos by inhaling airborne asbestos fibers and dust from asbestos-containing materials. Exposure to asbestos has been linked to diseases such as mesothelioma, asbestosis and lung cancer.

After a catastrophic emergency strikes, the clean up and disposal of building rubble and debris from significantly damaged or demolished houses and buildings soon follows, as communities begin to return to normalcy. The ACM, which may be contained within the mixed rubble and debris from damaged and demolished houses and buildings, generally cannot be safely or effectively removed from the damaged building materials without risking the uncontrolled release of asbestos fibers and dust. As building rubble and debris are cleaned up, loaded and hauled away in tarped vehicles for disposal, the release of airborne asbestos fibers and dust can be minimized by following proper work practices. These practices include containing the ACM and wetting the material as an effective engineering control for decreasing the release of asbestos fibers and dust during clean up, hauling and disposal activities.

KDHE regulations require that any contractor removing asbestos be licensed. If homeowners elect to do the work themselves, KDHE recommends the following work practices to help minimize possible exposure to asbestos when performing debris removal and demolition activities:

- Workers should wear an N-95 dust mask or better for respiratory protection, as well as gloves to help keep dust and fibers off of hands. Coveralls, hard hats and other protective clothing should also be worn when possible.
- Shower and wash thoroughly after debris removal, to remove dust and fibers on your body that could later become airborne.
- Materials being removed from damaged structures should be dampened with water under low pressure before removal, to minimize dust and fibers.
- Do not disturb any materials that do not need to be removed, in order to prevent the needless release of dust and fibers.
- Knock down structures wall-by-wall, folding each wall in on itself to minimize excess breakage of asbestos-containing material. During demolition the structure should be kept wet to minimize the release of fibers.
- Materials that could contain asbestos should be kept wet and covered by a tarp or other enclosure while being transported on a vehicle for disposal.
- Consult with a licensed contractor or emergency personnel trained in asbestos removal and disposal whenever possible.

Materials that could contain asbestos include the following items in structures:

- Ceiling and floor tiles
- Textured ceilings
- Roofing materials, including shingles and roofing felt
- Siding
- Vermiculite attic insulation
- Pipe wrapping materials
- Acoustical panels
- Asbestos-cement materials, such as pipes, millboard and corrugated sheet items

Disposal of these building materials from damaged and demolished houses, buildings and other structures must be at disposal sites approved by KDHE Bureau of Waste Management (BWM).

Kansas Asbestos Control Regulations as well as the federal Clean Air Act, under the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) regulates the removal, clean up, and disposal of friable, crushed or damaged ACM during normal or planned renovation or demolition of houses, buildings, and structures. The EPA regulations, known as the asbestos National Emissions Standard for Hazardous Air Pollutants (NESHAP) standard require using handling, and work practices which minimize the disturbance and release of airborne asbestos fibers and dust to the outside air. Consequently, the asbestos NESHAP regulations prohibit the burning of building materials, including rubble, debris and other waste. Burning would destroy the binding materials surrounding the asbestos fibers and dust (which do not burn) and subsequently cause the release of asbestos fibers and dust into the air. In Kansas, the KDHE enforces the asbestos NESHAP regulations.

The federal and state asbestos control regulations allow for the streamlined and expedited clean up and disposal of building rubble and debris which has a high probability of containing damaged ACM. Buildings, houses and other structures that are not significantly damaged, may require some renovations or subsequently be demolished must comply with all federal and state asbestos control regulations. These include requirements for inspections for ACM (where feasible), written 10 day pre-notification to KDHE (when feasible) prior to demolition; as well as work practices and procedures for the safe and effective removal of regulated ACM, and the disposal of ACM waste at an approved waste disposal site.

For further information regarding handling, safe removal, clean up, or disposal of asbestos-containing building materials, contact KDHE Bureau of Environmental Health, Radiation and Asbestos Control Section at (785) 296-1689.