



Kansas Department of Health and Environment – Bureau of Air
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Kansas Asbestos Control: What Homeowners Should Know

What is asbestos? It is a mineral fiber occurring naturally in soil and rock. Its fiber strength made it suitable for manufacturing insulation and fire-resistance materials in building construction. Asbestos-containing materials, or ACMs, can be found in older buildings such as schools, churches and residential houses, especially those built before the early 1980s. Modern homes and buildings generally do not contain ACMs.

Do not panic if asbestos is found or suspected in your home. Just because your home has materials that contain asbestos does not mean your health is in danger. If ACMs are not disturbed and asbestos fibers are not released, then risk for asbestos-related health issues is low. Asbestos-containing materials with more than one percent asbestos are referred to in the regulations as friable or non-friable. By definition, friable ACMs, when dry, will crumble or become powder by using only hand pressure. Non-friable ACMs cannot be pulverized under hand pressure. However, non-friable ACMs can become friable if crushed, pulverized or ground by other means (e.g., by using a hammer or drill).

Examples of ACMs in older homes that would be considered **friable** include the following:

- Popcorn ceilings
- Textured paints or sprayed-on surfacing materials
- Mastic adhesives for vinyl floors, carpets and ceiling tiles
- Paper underlayment for flooring (“felt”)
- Roofing felts
- Loose or batt insulation
- Insulation board on walls
- Pipe insulations
- Flexible connections for ventilation ducts
- Fuse-box linings and insulation on electrical wires
- Duct insulation damaged or in poor condition

Examples of ACMs in homes, generally considered **non-friable**, include the following:

- Asphalt roofing shingles
- Cement roofing shingles and tiles
- Cement sidings
- Vinyl or asphalt floor tiles
- Vinyl wall coverings
- Rubber stair treads and risers
- Cement pipes
- Insulation around in-cabinet ovens and dishwashers
- Cement sheets around fireplaces, wood stoves and boilers.

Additionally, automobile brake shoes, pads and linings, gaskets and clutch facings may contain asbestos.

Why be concerned about asbestos?

When products or materials containing asbestos are disturbed by activities such as repairs, renovation or demolition, extremely small asbestos fibers are released into the air — imagine a strand of human hair divided 1,200 times! They can only be seen using a powerful microscope. Because asbestos fibers are microscopic, they can be suspended in the air for hours, or even days, after other construction dust has settled. People can inhale the fibers deep into their lungs, which can cause serious health problems. The amount of fibers deposited in the lungs increases with continued exposure, which can result in deadly lung diseases; however, symptoms may not show up for 10 to 30 years.



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SMOKERS BEWARE! People who smoke and have been exposed to asbestos greatly increase their risk of developing asbestos-related lung cancer. Smokers are 50 to 90 times more likely to get asbestos-related lung cancer than non-smokers who have not been exposed to asbestos.

How can asbestos be identified?

People who frequently work with ACMs have an idea if a material contains asbestos; however, visual identification should not be relied upon. The only way to find out if asbestos is present in a material is by sending a sample to a laboratory for testing. While it is legal for a homeowner to collect samples, **it is not recommended**. It is better to have a trained professional take samples because of the increased health risk from disturbing ACMs when collecting samples. A list of [firms offering asbestos inspection and sampling services](#) is available on the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE), Bureau of Air, asbestos website.

If you decide to collect samples yourself, it is important to be extremely careful not to release asbestos fibers. The following steps should be taken when collecting samples for asbestos analysis:

- Wear disposable gloves or wash hands thoroughly when you are through.
- Turn off heating or cooling systems to prevent fans from blowing during sample collection.
- Slightly wet the material to be sampled.
- Make sure the material is in good condition, and do not disturb the material more than necessary for the purpose of taking samples.
- Use a knife, corer or other sharp object to cut or scrape a small piece of material.
 - For friable samples (e.g., popcorn ceiling), collect approximately one teaspoon.
 - For non-friable samples (e.g., floor tile, siding), collect approximately one square inch.
- Use a clean container, such as a small glass or plastic vial, or a self-closing plastic bag, to transport the material to the laboratory.
- Tightly seal the container after collecting the sample.
- Carefully clean the outside of the container with a damp paper towel.
- Label containers with an identification number, date and location where the sample was taken.
- Send samples for analysis to a laboratory accredited by the National Voluntary Laboratory Accreditation Program, or an [NVLAP-accredited laboratory](#), or consult with one of the [firms on the KDHE website](#).
- Patch the sampled area with duct tape to keep remaining fibers intact.

What if you find asbestos in your home?

Do not panic if asbestos is found or suspected in your home. Just because your home has materials that contain asbestos does not mean your health is in danger. If the ACM is in good condition, leave it alone and do not disturb. Leaving ACMs alone is the least costly option.

Consider educating children living in the home about the danger of asbestos. Some helpful tips follow:

- Leave undamaged ACMs alone.
- Limit children's access to suspected ACMs.
- Employ services of trained and licensed handlers.
- Avoid disturbing suspect ACMs.
- Do not vacuum, dust or sweep damaged ACMs.
- Do not grind, crush, pulverize or use power tools on suspected ACMs.
- Wet ACMs and wrap in plastic, if you have to transport them through the house.



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If an ACM is damaged, or remodeling plans will mean disturbing or removing ACMs, then seek advice and services of a trained and accredited asbestos professional. The professional can assess the risk of disturbing or removing the ACMs in your home, and advise on the best way to proceed. Options for proceeding include leave alone, repair, encapsulate or remove.

Leave alone — Unless the ACM will easily be broken or damaged, it is safer to leave it in place than remove it. Remember, it is the release of asbestos fibers that creates a health risk.

Repair — If a few inches of an ACM, such as insulation around hot water pipes or heating ducts, are torn or loose, it may make sense to repair it with duct tape. However, it is recommended you hire a professional.

Encapsulate — Kansas regulations define *encapsulation* as the application of a liquid sealant (coating- or penetrating-type) to greater than 10 square feet of an ACM to prevent the release of fibers. Another form of encapsulation is to cover an ACM with a non-ACM, such as laying new floor covering directly over asbestos-containing floor covering. Again, it is recommended this be done by a professional.

Although encapsulation may be the most desirable option now, it may hinder future removal of ACMs and add to the cost. For example, painted popcorn ceilings are very difficult to remove.

Remove

If there is a reason to remove suspected or confirmed ACMs (e.g. popcorn ceilings), the best approach is to seek the service of a licensed asbestos professional. Removal of ACMs and post-removal cleanup requires special handling skills and compliance with regulations.

A list of [Kansas-licensed, asbestos abatement contractors](#) is found on the KDHE Bureau of Air asbestos website. In addition to following [KDHE asbestos regulations](#), these professional contractors must also follow regulations under the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, or OSHA, and the United States Environmental Protection Agency, or U.S. EPA. Homeowners are not regulated, provided they perform asbestos operations by themselves and the work is being done in a dwelling with fewer than four separate living units.

Summary

If asbestos is in your home, it is important to remember potential risks related to asbestos exposure. Laboratory analysis is the only way to confirm asbestos is present. It is safer to hire a licensed contractor for asbestos inspection and abatement operations than to do it yourself. It is advisable to take air samples in the house after cleaning to confirm the air is free of asbestos and is habitable. Be sure to protect your family against the risk of asbestos exposure.

Don't hesitate to call the KDHE asbestos program at 785-296-1549 with questions or concerns.

Resources

- KDHE asbestos program telephone number — 785-296-1549
- KDHE asbestos website — <http://www.kdheks.gov/asbestos/indexasb.html>
- EPA asbestos website — <http://www.epa.gov/asbestos>