Asbestos in Cement



Asbestos was a key ingredient in asbestos cement, or transite, until the 1980s. The cement was in turn used to make many building materials and products. But why?

- It reinforced the materials, making them less likely to crack
- It was readily available and cheap
- It mixed well with other ingredients
- It reduced corrosion on products, especially pipes

For these reasons, it was often viewed as a necessary component in many building materials– cement being no exception. That is, until it was found that asbestos exposure poses serious health risks.

Why asbestos is dangerous

The carcinogenic properties of asbestos far outweigh the benefits of using it. Inhaled loose asbestos fibers lodge themselves in the lining of the lungs to cause inflammation and scarring. This, in turn, can cause mesothelioma or other cancers to form.

Furthermore, people who live with workers regularly exposed to asbestos can be exposed through contact with contaminated clothes, skin, or hair. This is considered secondary exposure and occurs whenever someone unknowingly carries asbestos from a site and deposits it on furniture, in a car, or clothing that’s used by others. Since no level of asbestos is safe, this form of exposure can increase an entire family’s risk of developing mesothelioma or other asbestos-related diseases.

What to watch out for

Asbestos cement was used in a lot of different products and was especially popular in pipes and roofing tiles until the 1980’s. However, due to the nature of cement being a mixed material, asbestos is undetectable by simply looking at it. If you suspect there may be asbestos in a material, have it tested by a professional. Asbestos cement could be in any of these materials:

- Roofing sheets
- Corrugated roof sheets
- Cement pipes
- Wallboards
- Ducts
- Gutters
- Bonding cement

- Fireproofing cement

Because transite has an average lifespan of 70 years, many such products are still in place in homes. While stable asbestos isn’t dangerous, disturbed asbestos releases fibers, polluting the air around it. Thus demolition, renovations, or repairs to buildings that may have used asbestos cement poses a major health risk to the workers.

How to protect yourself

People who work with or may come into contact with asbestos cement need to prioritize respiratory safety. Proper PPE, ventilation, and decontamination processes are all crucial to protecting yourself and your loved ones from asbestos exposure. Further, be sure and call professionals for asbestos testing and removal if you do come across something you suspect may be asbestos cement.

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