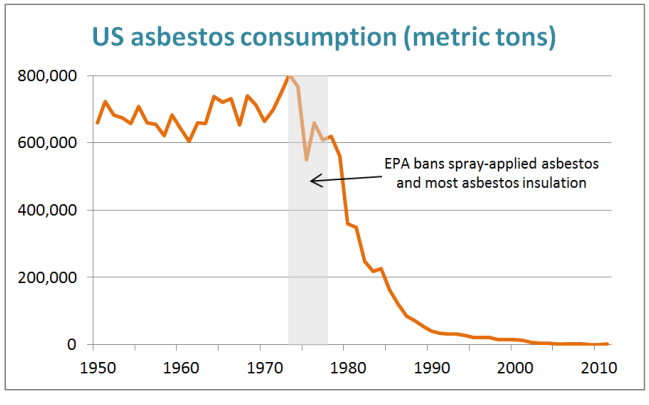
Asbestos: What Contractors Need to Know

BACKGROUND

Prior to the 1970s, when the federal ***Environmental Protection Agency*** (USEPA) banned spray-applied surfacing asbestos and most household asbestos insulation products, asbestos was a common residential construction material. Asbestos was a popular in manufacturing because it is fire-resistant, insulates against noise and heat, and resists electrical damage and chemical corrosion.



Potentially friable applications of asbestos were banned in the 1970s. Non-friable uses such as rigid roofing materials are still legal, though not widely used. (data source: minerals.usgs.gov)

HEALTH HAZARDS

Insulation and spray-applied surfacing products containing asbestos pose a health hazard if they become *friable*—that is, if they break into smaller visible chunks and microscopic fibers that can become airborne and inhaled. Once in the lung, asbestos fibers can cause irritation or, after prolonged exposure, a type of lung cancer called mesothelioma.

ASBESTOS IN THE HOME

What if I locate asbestos in the home?

If the home was built before that 1980s, and if you believe you have found asbestos, do not touch the material. But don't panic; asbestos that is incased in fabric and is not disturbed is likely not a health hazard. It is only when asbestos is disturbed and becomes friable that it is dangerous.

The only way to determine if an unlabeled material contains asbestos is to test a sample of the product. *Do not collect your own sample.* Hire a trained and accredited asbestos professional to take the sample and determine what abatement, if any, is needed.

How do I test air infiltration and duct leakage if I locate asbestos in the home?

The need for asbestos management can arise during a home performance upgrade if the ducts are insulated in asbestos-containing material. Building Performance Institute (BPI) guidelines prohibit you from performing a blower door depressurization test if there is a risk of asbestos becoming airborne and being drawn into the living space.

SMUD does not require a duct blaster test on ducts with suspected asbestos covering. If asbestos insulation is present and duct replacement is not part of the work-scope, the contractor should note this in the Job Reporting Template. If duct leakage cannot be measured due to presence of asbestos, the Title 24 Residential Compliance Manual default values for that home vintage (typically 28%) should be used.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Visit the ***USEPA website about asbestos***

Review ***BPI clarification*** of blower door testing in the presence of asbestos-containing materials

Contact us at ***moe@efficiencyfirstca.org***.

Metal heating ducts wrapped in asbestos. (source: Home Energy Pros, Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, 2012)