



# Safety Matters

Talking Points for Supervisors

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## Asbestos Awareness

Why do you still need to have asbestos awareness? Because even though most uses for the hazardous material have been banned, it can still be found in a variety of products, such as building materials and vehicle brakes. This group of naturally-occurring minerals can be exposed to workers during the manufacturing process, brake and clutch repairs, and renovations and demolitions.

The inhalation of asbestos fibers can cause serious disease of the lungs and other organs that may not appear until years after exposure. Asbestos fibers associated with these health risks are too small to be seen with the naked eye, and smokers are at a higher risk for developing asbestos-related diseases if exposed.

OSHA has standards to protect workers from exposure to asbestos in the workplace, as well as permissible exposure limits and exposure monitoring. OSHA regulations also exist for controlled zones known as regulated areas that are designed to protect employees where certain work with asbestos is performed.

The following tips are safety reminders for those who work near or with asbestos-containing materials:

- Never enter a controlled zone your company has designated as a regulated area where asbestos work is being performed.
- If you are not authorized and wearing appropriate respiratory protection, do not enter an asbestos regulated area.
- Do not eat, smoke, drink, chew gum or apply cosmetics in an asbestos regulated area.
- Read and obey all warning signs displayed in asbestos regulated areas.
- When working with asbestos, keep the material wet and vacuum the dust using a special HEPA vacuum. Immediately collect and close all waste in special bags designed to hold asbestos.
- Always wear required protective clothing such as coveralls or similar full-body clothing, head coverings, and gloves and foot coverings when working with asbestos. Face shields, goggles and other protective equipment may also be necessary if the possibility of eye irritation exists.
- Make sure you receive proper training and medical clearance if your work requires use of a respirator for asbestos protection. Make sure to use the correct type of respirator for the level of exposure. If you disturb or remove asbestos, you must wear at least a half-face respirator with N-, R-, or P-100 (HEPA) cartridges. OSHA also requires the use of a respirator in some cases when performing roofing and flooring work. Ask the 'competent person', as defined by OSHA on your jobsite, if you have the protection you need.
- Follow all required hygiene and decontamination practices after working with asbestos
- Leave your work clothes and shoes at work and wash them at work if they are not disposable. Family members of workers exposed to asbestos can get sick from asbestos taken home on a workers clothing or shoes. If required, shower at work after working with asbestos.
- Stay on top of your health by seeing a doctor who specializes in work-related or lung diseases if you have been exposed to asbestos. Tell the doctor you work around asbestos and ask how often you need to get a check-up.

**Better safe than sorry... If you are not sure whether you are working in an environment containing asbestos, OSHA recommends you act as though asbestos is present and take the appropriate safety measures.**

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