



Breakdown of asbestos management program exposes workers to asbestos fibres

In April 2005, eight construction workers were exposed to asbestos during the refurbishment of a classroom in a Lower Mainland secondary school. The school district did not inform the workers about the presence of asbestos. The workers removed asbestos-containing linoleum flooring and vinyl floor tile without the use of proper workplace controls or personal protective equipment. Dust from the work area also contaminated other rooms in the school.

What went wrong?

According to the WorkSafeBC report, the senior operations manager for the school district did not read the asbestos hazard report carefully enough and did not communicate the presence of asbestos to the construction workers.

“If (the senior operations manager) had read the report carefully, he would have become instantly aware that room 138 likely had a problem with asbestos,” the report stated. “Therefore I find that his failure to read this report and communicate its contents to the workers reaches the threshold of recklessness.”

As a result, eight construction workers were exposed to asbestos, and nearby teachers complained about the dust and experienced respiratory problems. The school district was fined \$75,000 for the incident.

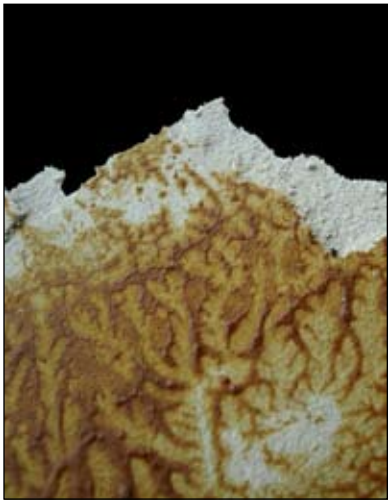


Asbestos-containing flooring

Asbestos-related diseases are still a problem

Between 1996 and 2005, more than 380 workers in B.C. died from asbestos-related diseases, thousands of workdays were lost, and claims costs were in the millions of dollars. Most of the workers affected were in the construction industry.

| Disease | Days lost (approximate) | Claims costs (approximate) |
|------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|
| Asbestosis | 11,000 | \$32,000,000 |
| Cancer | 92,000 | \$56,000,000 |

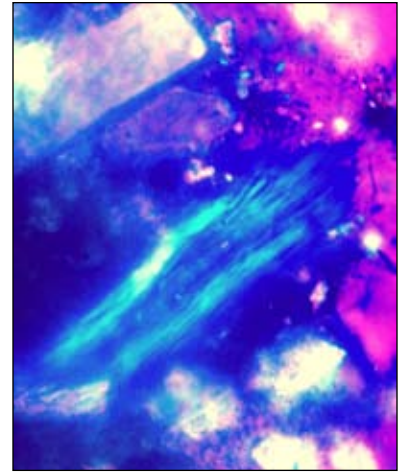


Asbestos linoleum backing

Asbestos management program

Part 6 of the Occupational Health and Safety Regulation requires that all asbestos-containing materials in the workplace be identified and labelled.

- An inventory of all asbestos-containing materials present in the workplace must be prepared and kept current.
- Asbestos-containing materials must be identified by signs, labels, or—when these are not practicable—other effective means.
- Records of asbestos-containing materials inventories, risk assessments, inspections, and air monitoring results must be maintained for at least 10 years.
- Any work that would possibly disturb asbestos-containing materials must not be conducted unless necessary precautions have been taken to protect workers.



Chrysotile asbestos (bright blue) in this micrograph of vinyl floor tile

How can school districts reduce the risk of worker exposure to asbestos?

Two of the most important things school districts can do are to maintain an accurate inventory of asbestos-containing materials in their buildings, and to keep that inventory up-to-date. This information must be reviewed carefully and communicated to workers *before* any demolition or renovation work takes place.

Any gaps in the asbestos inventory should be filled by sampling (or re-sampling) suspected building products. This is particularly important for gypsum board as well as linoleum and vinyl tile flooring, because classrooms may contain a mixture of asbestos-containing wall, ceiling, and flooring materials (especially in older buildings).

Loose-fill vermiculite insulation can be present in attics and concrete block walls. This material may contain between 0.3 and seven percent asbestos. Asbestos is an ALARA (as low as reasonably achievable) substance, and workers must be made aware of its presence even in small amounts (i.e., less than one percent).

It is very important to make sure that the person who conducts the assessment and sampling is qualified and trained, and that the samples are sent to a qualified asbestos laboratory for analysis.



Worker removing asbestos floor tile



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