



What is asbestos?

Asbestos is an odorless, naturally occurring, mineral fiber. Asbestos is hazardous when it is “friable.” The term “friable” means that the asbestos is easily crumbled by hand, releasing fibers into the air. The mere presence of asbestos is not a cause for concern unless it becomes airborne. When left intact and undisturbed, asbestos containing materials do not pose a health risk to people working or living in buildings. In fact, most people exposed to small amounts of asbestos, as we all are in our daily lives, do not develop health problems. The only time that asbestos can become airborne is when it is disturbed and handled in an unsafe manner.

Where is asbestos found?

Because it is fire-resistant, resists many chemicals and is an excellent insulator, asbestos was added to a variety of building materials and other manufactured goods. Many commercial buildings and personal residences built between the 1930’s and the 1970’s were constructed using some asbestos-containing building materials. Products that may have asbestos include roofing shingles, ceiling and floor tiles, spray-on ceiling materials, joint compound, cement products, textiles, coatings and friction products such as automobile clutch, brake and transmission parts.

Five Facts about Asbestos

- Although asbestos is hazardous, human risk of asbestosis depends on both the amount and duration of exposure.
- Based on data gathered by the EPA from across the nation, prevailing asbestos levels in buildings appear to be very low. Accordingly, the health risk faced by building occupants also appears to be low.
- Removal is often not a building owner’s best course of action to prevent significant public exposure. In fact, an improper removal can create a dangerous situation where one did not previously exist.
- The EPA only requires asbestos removal in order to prevent significant public exposure to asbestos, such as during building renovation, deterioration or demolition.
- The EPA recommends in-place management whenever asbestos is discovered. Instead of removal, a conscientious in-place management program will usually control fiber releases, particularly when the materials are not significantly damaged and are not likely to be disturbed.

Submitted by the EPA in congressional testimony.



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Asbestos



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Where might I encounter asbestos in my residence hall?

Asbestos can be found in floor tile, which is unlikely to release fibers into the air, sprayed-on ceiling materials and walls. Asbestos is also present in some pipe insulation and fire-proofing systems, which is generally inaccessible to students. Materials in our residence halls are presumed to contain asbestos unless sampling and analysis indicated otherwise. USC maintains asbestos-containing materials within your residence hall so they do not crumble and release fibers into the air.

To assist us in keeping you safe, please make sure to report all room damage and maintenance issues immediately to FIXX at www.housing.sc.edu/fixx.html or by calling 803-777-3499. If you are concerned about the presence of asbestos in your room, please contact University Housing at 803-777-4283.

There is a barrier and an asbestos warning sign in my building. Am I safe to live here?

When damage occurs, University Housing assumes that materials contain asbestos and will act accordingly until it is determined otherwise. Therefore, barriers may be set up around the damaged area. Per South Carolina Department of Health and Environment Control (SC DHEC) and Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) regulations, warning signs will always be posted on or near barriers enclosing an asbestos removal site to notify people of the work going on. The area outside of the barrier is safe, but extreme care should be taken not to enter the work site.

What can I do to protect myself?

The most important thing you can do to protect yourself is to follow a few simple steps when decorating your room:

- **Do not disturb sprayed-on ceiling materials.** Make sure that lofts have at least 30 inches of clearance from the top of the mattress to the ceiling and are installed only in approved buildings. Do not hang anything from the ceiling.
- **Do not use nails, screws, tacks or hooks** to secure personal items to walls, doors or furniture. Use poster putty or 3M Command Strips to secure items. When vacating a room, students should leave the 3M Command Strip on the wall so Housing staff can safely remove it.
- **Do not saw or cut any building materials** in the room or otherwise disturb room finishes and pipe insulation.

If damaged materials are present in a room when you arrive, please contact FIXX online at www.housing.sc.edu/fixx.html.

Student behavior, including vandalism and horseplay, can also damage finishes that may result in possible exposure. When damage occurs due to a student's behavior, the student may be subject to judicial proceedings and may be billed for repairs and air-testing.

Throughout the year, students should report damage in their residence hall from vandalism or horseplay immediately to FIXX by calling 803-777-3499.

Why doesn't USC remove all asbestos from buildings?

Large amounts of more hazardous forms of asbestos have already been removed. However, asbestos in floor tile and insulation is harmless if it is in good condition. Asbestos-containing materials will not release asbestos fibers unless they are disturbed or damaged in some way. When left intact and undisturbed, asbestos poses no risk to building occupants. Asbestos is removed during demolitions, repairs due to deterioration and renovations in conjunction with planned improvements and related projects. Therefore, small amounts of asbestos may be found within student rooms in housing facilities at the University of South Carolina. The abatement process is performed by licensed personnel and all asbestos removal projects are overseen by the University of South Carolina's Department of Health and Environmental Safety. The University regularly removes asbestos from campus buildings in conjunction with renovation projects.

Agencies that Regulate Asbestos

- **South Carolina Department of Health and Environment Control (SC DHEC)** - this state agency is charged with protecting public health, coastal resources and the state's land, air and water quality as authorized under multiple state and federal laws. (www.scdhec.gov)
- **US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)** - this federal agency's mission is to protect human health and the environment. (www.epa.gov)
- **Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA)** - this federal agency was created to assure safe and healthful working conditions for working men and women by setting and enforcing standards and by providing training, outreach, education and assistance. (www.osha.gov)