Clean Classrooms™
For Carolina Kids

Information on Asbestos

As part of the *Clean Classrooms for Carolina Kids*™ program, RTI International has compiled the following information for parents, schools, and child care providers about asbestos; this information comes from reliable scientific and government resources. Please contact us for more information about our program.

What is asbestos and why is it found in some buildings?

Asbestos is a general term referring to a group of naturally occurring minerals that tend to separate into fibers and are resistant to heat and corrosion. Because of its physical properties, asbestos was commonly used for many years in a variety of building materials, such as ceiling tiles, fiber-reinforced cement, floor tiles, insulation, roofing, and even woven materials like fireproof curtains and gaskets.

How does exposure to asbestos occur?

While asbestos has many useful properties for building materials, asbestos poses a concern for public health when asbestos-containing building materials are not safely managed. When asbestos-containing materials are disturbed or damaged, tiny asbestos fibers can be released into the air. Airborne asbestos fibers may even settle in dust, which can be resuspended into the air when it is disturbed by routine activities in the building. When these fibers are breathed in, they can get trapped in the lungs and remain there for a long time. They can also migrate from the lungs to other spaces in the body.

What are the health risks from asbestos exposure?

There is no safe level of exposure for any type of asbestos. Health risks from asbestos exposure increase with the length and frequency of exposure. Asbestos exposure irritates lung tissue and can lead to serious respiratory diseases and certain cancers, such as lung cancer and mesothelioma. Some of these diseases take many years to develop, so exposure in childhood can lead to the development of asbestos-related disease later in life.

What federal efforts have been taken to reduce asbestos hazards?

Since 1973, the National Emissions Standards for Hazardous Air Pollutants (NESHAP) rules have regulated demolition and renovation work, minimizing exposure and ensuring safe work practices are followed when asbestos-containing materials are present.

In 1986, the Asbestos Hazard Emergency Response Act (AHERA) was passed, which requires all public and private not-for-profit schools to perform an inspection of the whole facility to determine whether asbestos-containing materials are present and prepare a management plan that details how the material should be managed to keep occupants safe. Schools built after 1988 may be exempt from an inspection if they have a signed statement from an architect, project engineer, or inspector attesting that no asbestos-containing building material was used in the construction of the building. However, they are still required to have these statements in a management plan. In general, asbestos-containing materials are still in use, with subsequent regulations narrowing the scope of use.

NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR ASBESTOS

Asbestos-containing material is defined as any material containing more than 1% asbestos.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) set the permissible exposure limit for asbestos in the workplace at 0.1 fibers/cubic centimeter of air as a time-weighted average.

What actions can I take to reduce exposure to asbestos?

Asbestos-containing materials that are in good condition are not likely to pose a health risk. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends the following tips to reduce exposure to asbestos:

- Avoid touching or disturbing possible asbestos-containing materials in your home.
- Clean surfaces with a wet rag or mop.
- Vacuum regularly with a HEPA (high-efficiency particulate air) vacuum cleaner.

What is the likelihood of developing asbestos-related health problems?

Exposure to asbestos does not mean you will develop health problems, and symptoms may take many years to develop following exposure. According to the CDC, many factors should be considered, including:

- Length, frequency, and amount of asbestos exposure
- Length of time since the exposure began
- Size and type of asbestos to which you were exposed
- Tobacco and cigarette usage
- Other pre-existing lung conditions.

Online Resources

EPA: Learn About Asbestos

EPA: Federal Requirements for Asbestos Management in Schools

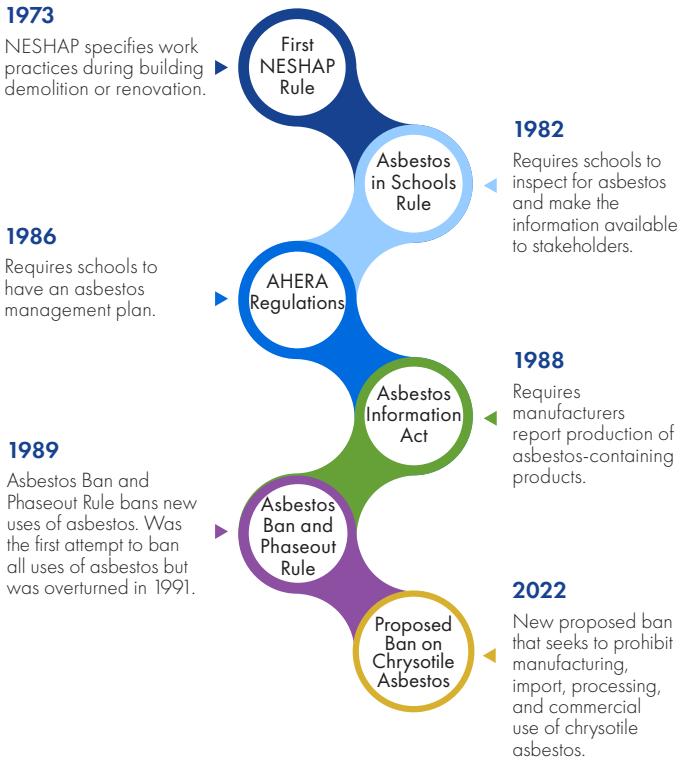
EPA: Trained and Accredited Asbestos Professionals

CDC: Asbestos and Your Health

CDC: Asbestos in Your Environment: What You Can Do to Limit Exposure

Clean Classrooms for Carolina Kids flyer: Asbestos Terminology

Federal Asbestos Regulations



Where can I find more information and resources?

- Visit the North Carolina Health Hazards Control Unit (HHCU) Asbestos Hazard Management Program website.
- Find a list of accredited asbestos professionals in North Carolina.

More Information

Clean Classrooms for Carolina Kids™
https://www.cleanwaterforuskids.org/en/carolina/contact/
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