

Asbestos Safety for Real Estate Professionals

#1HA2010

Attention Real Estate Agents, Brokers, and Property Managers: *Not knowing about asbestos safety can put you and others at risk for dangerous exposure to this known carcinogen. For example:*

In one Washington State incident, a realtor hired a contractor to remove asbestos-containing “popcorn” ceiling material from a home that had recently been sold. Neither the contractor nor the day laborer he hired was certified to remove asbestos. As a result, asbestos wasn’t safely removed and asbestos contamination was spread throughout the inside of the home, to the yard, and even to neighboring properties, creating a serious health threat.



Warning: Asbestos!

A white trail of pulverized asbestos debris contaminated a driveway, a vehicle, and even neighboring properties. The realtor involved didn’t use a certified contractor to remove asbestos “popcorn” ceiling material, as required by [WAC 296-65-030](#).

How is asbestos hazardous?

Asbestos-containing materials that have been disturbed by crushing, scraping, tearing, cutting, or other actions could pose a threat. **However, asbestos-containing material that is undamaged, enclosed, or encapsulated is not a hazard.**

When asbestos-containing materials are disturbed they release microscopic asbestos fibers that are easily inhaled deeply into the lungs. Due to their size, these fibers can stay suspended in the air for days after being released and you can’t see them, smell them, or feel them.

Inhaled asbestos fibers can cause a potentially fatal lung disease (called asbestosis), and various forms of cancer, especially mesothelioma and lung cancer. Each exposure increases the likelihood of developing these diseases. But you won’t know it right away, since these diseases take a long time to develop, usually 10 – 40 years after exposure.

Don’t assume newer homes and buildings are asbestos free. Floor tile, mastic, and roofing tar are some examples of asbestos-containing materials still allowed to be sold and used.

How can I stay safe when visiting properties?

If encounters with asbestos can occur, don’t put your health (or others’) at risk or your employer in violation of applicable safety rules. Violations of safety rules may also carry substantial monetary fines. Work with your employer to ensure your safety during property visits and:

1. **Learn how to recognize asbestos** so you can avoid contact while visiting properties. L & I recommends that employers provide information and training that covers the items listed in [WAC 296-62-07722 \(4\) \(c\)](#).

Examples of materials to look out for in single family homes include popcorn ceilings, boiler and duct insulation, “cloth” duct tape, “paper” under wood shingle roofs, 9 x 9 and 12 x 12 floor tiles, and “paper” backing on sheet vinyl flooring. For more information, see “Other Resources” below.

2. **Steer clear of debris** (even small amounts) that could contain asbestos.
 - If you see debris on the floor in an area you need to enter and suspect it could contain asbestos, leave immediately and stay out until the debris is properly cleaned up and disposed of. Stepping on debris that can be crushed releases asbestos fibers into the air.
 - If you are expected to pick-up, clean-up, or dispose of suspected asbestos debris at a property, your employer must first provide special training and equipment, as required by [WAC 296-62-07712 \(12\)](#).
3. **Do not collect samples of materials suspected to contain asbestos** on behalf of your employer, the property owner, or someone else. Sampling must be done by an EPA-certified, AHERA* -building inspector trained to safely use established testing and evaluation protocols to reliably identify and sample asbestos.

* AHERA is the Asbestos Hazard Emergency Response Act of 1986 (15 USC)



4. **Don't engage in asbestos removal activities.** Removal of undamaged asbestos is not necessary or recommended. If you decide to have asbestos removed on behalf of a building owner, or someone else, you'll need to follow all applicable requirements:
 - Conduct a "good-faith" inspection ([WAC 296-62-07721 \(1\)\(c\)](#)) as required of building owner's agents (see definition in [WAC 296-62-07703](#)).
 - Use a **certified**-asbestos abatement contractor to do the work ([WAC 296-65-030](#)). These contractors are specially trained and required to follow all applicable safety requirements in [WAC 296-62-077](#) and [WAC 296-65-020](#), including job notification to L & I, employee training and certification, use of appropriate protective equipment and proper work practices, clearance testing, and other safety measures.
5. **Share this Hazard Alert** with other realtors and individuals in your health & safety network who might encounter asbestos at properties.

Other Resources

- Visit [L&I's Asbestos Certification](#) webpage to find information and rules for building owners and contractors.
- A single list of currently-certified EPA/AHERA building inspectors is **not** available; however, firms that train and certify these inspectors may provide you with their lists. A list of these training and certification firms is available from [EPA's website](#).
- EPA's website also provides [information](#) to help you identify products that may contain asbestos.

How can I get help from Labor & Industries?

The Department of Labor & Industries provides consultations, training, and technical assistance at no cost to employers. Call today to schedule a confidential consultation or go to [Request Consultation](#) for more information. You may also call 1-800-423-7233 or visit a local L&I office and ask for the consultation supervisor.

Hazard Alert inside

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