

EMPLOYER FACT SHEET

ASBESTOS

This fact sheet helps hospitality and tourism employers in British Columbia understand their legal obligations related to asbestos under WorkSafeBC. It provides general guidance to prevent worker exposure, support compliance, and promote safe work practices where asbestos may be present.

What is asbestos?

Asbestos is a group of naturally occurring fibrous minerals used in older building materials for insulation, fireproofing, and durability. Although the use of asbestos is now restricted, it remains present in many buildings and structures constructed or renovated prior to the early 1990s. Most common types found in B.C. include:

- Chrysotile (white asbestos)
- Amosite (brown asbestos)

WorkSafeBC defines Asbestos-Containing Material (ACM) as any manufactured article or material (except vermiculite insulation) containing at least 0.5% asbestos by accredited laboratory testing. ACM may be:

- Friable – easily crumbled
- Non-friable – bound in solid material

Why is asbestos dangerous?

Disturbing asbestos can release asbestos fibres that your eye cannot see which can stay in the air for hours. These fibres can easily be inhaled and cause serious long-term illnesses such as:

- Asbestosis
- Lung cancer
- Mesothelioma (a cancer)
- Pleural thickening (a lung disease)

Symptoms do not develop right away, and noticeable effects may take years to appear. Workers in older buildings (maintenance staff, renovation contractors, plumbers, electricians) are at higher risk.



Where can asbestos be found?

Common building materials in hospitality and tourism workplaces that may contain asbestos include, but are not limited to:

- Drywall joints and textured ceilings
- Vinyl flooring and adhesives
- Pipe and mechanical insulation
- Acoustic ceiling tiles
- Roofing materials and exterior cladding

Asbestos cannot be detected by looking at it. If you think asbestos may be present, stop work and restrict access to the area. Have a qualified asbestos professional complete a proper asbestos survey before continuing

What Legislation Applies?

[OHS Regulation Part 6.1-6.32: Substance Specific Requirements, Asbestos](#)

- 6.4 Asbestos Inventory
- 6.3 Exposure Control Plan
- 6.11 Instruction and Training

[OHS Regulation Part 20.112: Construction, Excavation and Demolition, Hazardous Materials](#)

Under WorkSafeBC, what are employers' responsibilities?

All workplace parties have health and safety responsibilities, including owners, prime contractors, employers, supervisors, workers and consultants. Employers must take all reasonable steps to protect workers, including:

- Identify if asbestos is present before maintenance, repair, or renovations.
- Have a qualified person survey materials and determine the risk level.
- Develop an Exposure Control Plan (ECP) when workers may be exposed.
- Implement controls to prevent fibre release (containment, signage, PPE, decontamination).
- Use only licensed asbestos abatement contractors for asbestos work.
- Train applicable staff to recognize potential asbestos and what to do if they encounter it.
- Maintain documents and records (surveys, inventories, risk assessments, ECPs, training).
- Protect people at the workplace, restrict access during work and ensure safe cleanup and disposal.

For detailed responsibilities, see WorkSafeBC's Safe Work Practices for Handling Asbestos.

What are workers' rights?

Workers have rights that apply to all work, including asbestos: the **right to know** about hazards, the **right to participate** in health and safety matters, and the **right to refuse unsafe work**. This means workers must be informed about asbestos risks, receive proper training, understand the dangers of exposure, and may refuse work they believe puts them at risk.

How is asbestos identified?

Asbestos cannot be identified just by looking at it. WorkSafeBC requires:

- Building materials in pre-1990 buildings are to be treated as suspected ACM until otherwise confirmed.
- Only qualified persons are to inspect, sample, and test materials using accredited laboratories.
- Findings are to be recorded in an asbestos survey showing location, type, condition, and risk.
- An asbestos inventory must be maintained and made accessible to workers and contractors.

If workers discover materials they think may contain asbestos (old drywall, flooring, insulation, or ceiling finishes) they must stop work immediately and report it so the material can be properly and safely assessed.



How do we control exposure and ensure worker safety?

Employers must ensure exposure is kept "as low as reasonably achievable" (ALARA) and below regulatory limits. Controls and safe work practices should follow the Hierarchy of Controls.

- Elimination and substitution (remove the ACM and replace ACM with safer materials).
- Engineering controls (encapsulate the material, enclosures, negative air units, HEPA filtration).
- Administrative controls (procedures, inspections, signage, training, emergency plans).
- Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) (gloves, eye protection, respirators, protective clothing).

Note: PPE is the least effective on its own and must be used with other controls.

For controlling asbestos, work with a qualified person and licensed abatement contractor (as applicable) to ensure:

- Procedures cover exposure control, waste handling, decontamination, and emergencies.
- Workers are trained to recognize potential ACM and records are maintained.
- PPE is properly used and maintained, respirators require proper fit-testing.
- Air monitoring verifies exposure levels, controls, and area is safe before re occupancy.
- Waste is handled by trained workers and disposed of at approved facilities per WorkSafeBC and local requirements.

This fact sheet provides general guidance for employers in the hospitality and tourism industry and does not replace the requirements of the Workers Compensation Act or the Occupational Health and Safety Regulation. Employers must ensure they comply with all applicable legal requirements and seek professional advice where necessary.

What should we do before starting any renovation?

Before any renovation (updating guest rooms, replacing flooring, opening ceilings, removing old kitchen equipment) begins, employers must ensure the work can be done safely and in compliance with WorkSafeBC requirements. This includes:

- Have a qualified person conduct an asbestos survey.
- Review the survey results with workers and contractors before work begins.
- Develop or update the Exposure Control Plan (ECP) based on the survey findings.
- If possible, plan the work to avoid disturbing ACMs.
- Use a licensed asbestos abatement contractor as required by WorkSafeBC.
- Restrict access to the area until it is confirmed safe.
- Follow WorkSafeBC requirements to ensure the required steps are taken including any Notice of Project (NOP) submissions.

More Resources

WorkSafeBC Safe Work Practices for Handling Asbestos

- <https://www.worksafebc.com/en/health-safety/hazards-exposures/asbestos>
- <https://www.worksafebc.com/en/resource/s/health-safety/books-guides/safe-work-practices-for-handling-asbestos>

Still have questions? [Contact Us](#) to connect with our Health and Safety team