

ASBESTOS FACT SHEET

1. What is asbestos?

A general term given to a group of naturally occurring mineral silicates that are made up of long thin fibres. It was added to a wide variety of products to strengthen them, to provide heat or electrical insulation, to offer fire or chemical resistance, and/or to absorb sound.

2. Common locations of asbestos containing materials (UW)

Common uses of asbestos containing materials include pipe/cable insulation, wall and ceiling tiles, roofing and flooring, insulation against fire and sound, lab fume hood liners, drywall joint compound in drywall, stucco wall plaster, etc.

3. Health risks associated with asbestos

Asbestos poses health risks only when asbestos-containing materials are disturbed or damaged and fibres become airborne and are inhaled by the person. If the asbestos fibres are bound tightly together, such as in commercial materials like floor or ceiling tiles and siding, Health Canada considers that there are no significant health risks. Asbestos is only a health risk when fibres become airborne and people breathe them in.

Medical experts agree that non-friable asbestos-containing materials pose no significant health risk unless they are being drilled, ground, broken, sanded or worked on.

The inhalation of asbestos fibres can cause serious diseases of the lungs and other organs. These effects may not appear until years after the exposure has occurred. Asbestos fibres associated with these health risks are too small to be seen with the naked eye, which can make identification difficult. Asbestos fiber exposure can lead to scarring of the lungs that may potentially develop into an increased risk of developing lung cancer, asbestosis (fibrous scarring of the lung tissue), mesothelioma (cancer of the chest cavity lining), and other diseases (including cancer of the lung and lung cavity, esophagus, stomach, colon and pancreas, pleural plaques, pleural thickening and pleural effusion).

4. Reporting procedure

If you have observed asbestos-containing material that has deteriorated, or has been disturbed, it must be reported to your supervisor. Your supervisor will contact Plant Operations to have the material remediated.

Work requests can be filled out [online](#) or by calling the 24-hour Plant Operations Maintenance line at ext. 43793.

5. Asbestos abatement

The abatement of asbestos containing materials is strictly regulated and controlled under [Regulation 278/05](#) of the [OHSA](#).

Handling and/or removing asbestos containing materials must only be carried out by abatement contractors subscribed to our contractor safety software and have a suitable grade to work on campus. Minor abatement (repair/removal) that is not part of a construction project is performed by trained staff (Plant Operations/IST) for each individual operation.

6. Where has asbestos containing materials been identified at UW?

All buildings have been assessed for designated substances. An inventory has been compiled including all accessible areas where visible asbestos may be found (designated substance inventory) and is available to competent staff in Plant Operations and IST.

7. UW's policy on protecting workers and students

The University of Waterloo is responsible to provide a safe and healthy environment free from avoidable or significant risks illnesses associated with exposure to asbestos fibres. Notification is provided to occupants when any construction, renovation or maintenance operations that could disturb asbestos-containing material occurs.

8. Asbestos awareness training at UW

UW has [training for occupants](#) to make them aware of asbestos-containing material on campus and allow them to apply this knowledge to avoid asbestos exposure.

[University Policy 22](#) outlines the requirements for preventing the disturbance of the infrastructure which could potentially disturb asbestos containing material.