

Asbestos: When You Find It

About 9 minutes to deliver

Old buildings hide it in a dozen materials, the rule presumes it in two of them, and the right response is to stop rather than to be careful.

Asbestos does nothing to you today. It does it in twenty or thirty years, and by then nothing can be done. That is the whole reason this talk exists — there is no feedback to learn from.

WHERE IT IS

Anything built or refitted before the early 1980s, and plenty after:

- pipe and boiler lagging, and the cement on the elbows
- sprayed fireproofing on steel, and textured ceiling coatings
- 9-inch floor tiles and the black mastic under them
- roofing felt, flashing, siding and cement board
- gaskets, rope seals, brake and clutch friction material
- drywall joint compound, window glazing, electrical panel backing

THE RULE PRESUMES IT

1926.1101 defines PACM — presumed asbestos containing material — as thermal system insulation and surfacing material in buildings constructed no later than 1980. You do not have to prove it is asbestos. It is treated as asbestos until somebody qualified proves it is not.

The exposure limit is 0.1 fibre per cubic centimetre over eight hours, with a short-term limit of 1.0 over thirty minutes. Those are small numbers, and you cannot see, smell or feel them.

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU FIND IT

Stop. Not "be careful", not "keep it wet and crack on". Stop.

- Put the tool down and leave it undisturbed. Material that is intact and undamaged is not hurting anybody. Material you have just put a hole saw through is.
- Get everyone out of the area and keep them out.
- Report it immediately so it can be surveyed and, if needed, handled by a licensed contractor.
- Do not sweep it, do not vacuum it with a shop vac, do not blow it down with air. All three put fibres into the air that were sitting still.
- Never take work clothes home if you think you have been exposed. Families have died from what came home on overalls, and that is not a story from the 1970s.

BEFORE YOU CUT

On any refurbishment or demolition of an older building, the survey happens first. If you have not seen one, ask — and if the answer is vague, that is your answer.

ASK THE CREW

- How old is this building, and has anyone seen an asbestos survey for it?
- What are we cutting, drilling or breaking into today that we have not identified?
- If you found suspect lagging at two o'clock, who would you tell?

29 CFR 1926.1101

This is a toolbox talk, not a course. It is general awareness on one topic — not site-specific, not a hazard assessment, and not a substitute for assessment of your workplace by a competent person, your written programs, or manufacturers' instructions. It does not by itself satisfy any OSHA training requirement. Regulations change; verify against the current standard. Whoever delivers it is responsible for deciding it is suitable and sufficient for the work. Where a talk covers first aid, resuscitation, or mental health it is general safety information, not medical advice, not a substitute for professional medical care or certified emergency-response training, and it confers no certification — in an emergency, call 911. Free to print and use, as is, with no warranty of any kind. Migna Safety Solutions · training.mignasafety.com

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I delivered this talk and determined it was suitable for this crew and this work.

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