

# Asbestos in Schools

Asbestos is a naturally occurring mineral fiber, once widely used in building materials for its thermal insulating properties and fire resistance. Although the removal of asbestos from school buildings is an option for schools, many schools and local education agencies have chosen to manage some asbestos-containing building material in place.

Intact, undisturbed asbestos-containing materials generally do not pose a health risk. These materials may become hazardous and pose increased risk if they are damaged, are disturbed in some manner, or deteriorate over time and thus release asbestos fibers into building air.

A number of building materials still in use today contain asbestos. Asbestos remains in use as an acoustic insulator, thermal insulation, fire proofing, roofing, flooring and other materials. You can find a more complete list of where you can find asbestos at: <http://www.epa.gov/asbestos/asbuses.pdf>

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## What is EPA doing to help keep children safe?

EPA's asbestos program for schools, Asbestos Hazard Emergency Response Act, (AHERA) and its guidance for other building owners is founded on the principle of "in-place" management of ACM. This approach is designed to keep asbestos fiber levels low by teaching people to recognize asbestos-containing materials and actively manage them. Removal of ACM is not usually necessary unless the material is severely damaged or will be disturbed by a building demolition or renovation project.

## **What is AHERA?**

The Asbestos Hazard Emergency Response Act (AHERA), a provision of the Toxic Substances Control Act, was passed by Congress in 1986. AHERA requires local educational agencies to inspect their schools for asbestos-containing building material and prepare management plans that make recommendations for the reduction of asbestos hazards.

Public school districts and non-profit private schools (collectively called local educational agencies) are subject to AHERA's requirements. This includes charter schools and schools affiliated with religious institutions.

EPA provides local education agencies and parents and teachers with information about the AHERA asbestos-in-schools requirements.

A list of regional contacts and news: [www.epa.gov/asbestos/regioncontact.html](http://www.epa.gov/asbestos/regioncontact.html)

## **How do schools comply with AHERA?**

The rules implementing AHERA are published in the Code of Federal Regulations, Chapter 40, Part 763, Subpart E. The AHERA rules require local education agencies to take actions, including the following:

- Perform an original inspection and re-inspection every three years of asbestos-containing material;
- Develop, maintain, and update an asbestos management plan and keep a copy at the school;
- Provide yearly notification to parent, teacher, and employee organizations regarding the availability of the school's asbestos management plan and any asbestos abatement actions taken or planned in the school;
- Designate a contact person to ensure the responsibilities of the local education agency are properly implemented;
- Perform periodic surveillance of known or suspected asbestos-containing building material;
- Ensure that properly-accredited professionals perform inspections and response actions and prepare management plans; and
- Provide custodial staff with asbestos-awareness training.

[Asbestos in Schools Enforcement Alert](#) - EPA's Office of Enforcement and Compliance Assurance has issued an AHERA enforcement alert concerning exposure to asbestos hazards in schools.

## **What else can I do as a school administrator to ensure that students are safe?**

The Asbestos National Emissions Standards for Hazardous Air Pollutants (NESHAP), found at 40 CFR Part 61, Subpart M, requires that owners or operators of facilities notify the appropriate authority (usually the state air agency) before demolishing or renovating facilities. If minimum amounts of regulated asbestos will be removed or disturbed, the owner/operator must adequately wet and carefully remove the asbestos components, keeping them wet until collected for disposal, and then disposing of the asbestos waste in accordance with the regulations.

There are certain emergency exceptions to allow speedy cleanup of unsafe buildings and other extraordinary conditions. The Asbestos NESHAP defines the kinds of facilities and asbestos that are regulated. Additional information at:

[www.epa.gov/compliance/resources/policies/civil/caa/neshapguid.html](http://www.epa.gov/compliance/resources/policies/civil/caa/neshapguid.html)

- *Resources for Local Education Agency (LEA) Designated Persons*
- [Asbestos in Schools Fact Sheet](#) (1 pp., 334K) (August 2003)
- Fact Sheet - [What LEAs Should Know About the National Emission Standard for Hazardous Air Pollutants \(NESHAP\)](#) (1 pp., 61.8K) (March 2005)
- [How to Manage Asbestos in School Buildings - AHERA Designated Person's Self-study Guide](#) (103 pp., 653K) (January 1996) - This document is located on EPA Region 2's [Asbestos in Schools](#) web page

If you need assistance in obtaining the content of these documents, please contact EPA's National Program Chemicals Division at 202-566-0500.

## **Health Effects of Asbestos**

Exposure to airborne friable asbestos may result in a potential health risk because persons breathing the air may breathe in asbestos fibers. Continued exposure can increase the amount of fibers that remain in the lung. Fibers embedded in lung tissue over time may cause serious lung diseases including: asbestosis, lung cancer, or mesothelioma.

- a) Asbestosis - Asbestosis is a serious, progressive, long-term non-cancer disease of the lungs. It is caused by inhaling asbestos fibers that irritate lung tissues and cause the tissues to scar. The scarring makes it hard for oxygen to get into the blood. Symptoms of asbestosis include shortness of breath and a dry, crackling sound in the lungs while inhaling. There is no effective treatment for asbestosis.

b) Lung Cancer - Lung cancer causes the largest number of deaths related to asbestos exposure. People who work in the mining, milling, manufacturing of asbestos, and those who use asbestos and its products are more likely to develop lung cancer than the general population. The most common symptoms of lung cancer are coughing and a change in breathing. Other symptoms include shortness of breath, persistent chest pains, hoarseness, and anemia. People who have been exposed to asbestos and also are exposed to some other cancer-causing product, such as cigarette smoke, have a greater risk of developing lung cancer than people who have only been exposed to asbestos.

c) Mesothelioma - Mesothelioma is a rare form of cancer that is found in the thin lining (membrane) of the lung, chest, abdomen, and heart and almost all cases are linked to exposure to asbestos. This disease may not show up until many years after asbestos exposure. This is why great efforts are being made to prevent school children from being exposed.

If you feel you may have been exposed to airborne asbestos fibers, you should consider consulting a physician with expertise in pulmonary abnormalities.

### **Where can I learn more?**

You will find several resources on the EPA website including the recently updated [The ABC's of Asbestos in Schools](#) (20 pp., 1MB). If you need assistance in obtaining the content of this document, please contact EPA's National Program Chemicals Division at 202-566-0500. You can also request more information on the AHERA requirements from the Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA) Assistance Information Service at 202-554-1404, or from the Asbestos Ombudsman at 1-800-368-5888.

EPA maintains 10 Regional Offices to implement Federal environmental programs around the country. These Regional Offices cooperate with Federal, State, interstate, and local agencies, as well as with industry, academic institutions, and other private groups, to ensure that their Region's needs are addressed and that Federal environmental laws are upheld.

Within each Region, Regional Asbestos Coordinators and National Emission Standards for Hazardous Air Pollutants (NESHAPs) Asbestos Coordinators oversee Asbestos efforts: [www.epa.gov/asbestos/regioncontact.html](http://www.epa.gov/asbestos/regioncontact.html)

## Additional Resources

### EPA Links -

- Our [20 Frequently Asked Questions worksheet](#) (4 pp., 87.8K) (September 2003) about asbestos in schools is also a useful reference. [HTML version](#)
- [EPA General Regional Contact Information](#)
- [EPA Asbestos Contact Information](#)
- [Asbestos in Schools Publications](#)
- [Asbestos Regulations - 40 CFR Part 763, Subpart E](#)
- [EPA's Office of Children's Health Protection](#)
- [EPA's Healthy School Environments Web Portal](#)
- [EPA Region 2's AHERA Asbestos Management Plan Checklist](#) - EPA Region 2, in conjunction with EPA's Office of General Counsel, has developed an AHERA checklist for LEAs to use as guidance to help them comply with the Asbestos-Containing Materials in Schools Rule (40 CFR Part 763, Subpart E).
- [EPA Region 2's AHERA Model Asbestos Management Plan](#) - EPA Region 2 has developed a Model Asbestos Management Plan for LEAs which contains templates and step-by-step instructions for LEAs to use as guidance in developing and maintaining their plan. LEAs are required to develop and maintain an up-to-date asbestos management plan under the Asbestos-Containing Materials In Schools Rule (40 CFR Part 763, Subpart E).

### Non-EPA Links - [EXIT Disclaimer](#)

- ATSDR Asbestos Section- [Summary of asbestos](#)
- National Institute of Health - [ToxTown](#) - NIH and other agencies have created this interactive site as a guide to commonly encountered toxic substances.
- US Department of Education [Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools](#)
- American Federation of Teachers - [Asbestos](#)
- National Education Association [Environmental Health/Indoor Air Quality in Schools](#)
- [National Institute of Standards and Technology \(NIST\)](#) - NIST maintains a listing of accredited asbestos laboratories under the National Voluntary Laboratory Accreditation Program (NVLAP).
- [NVLAP Accredited Laboratories for the PLM Test Method](#)
- [NVLAP Accredited Laboratories for the TEM Test Method](#)

### Información para parientes, maestros y otros empleados escolares

- [El ABC del Asbesto en las Escuelas](#) (HTML)
- [El ABC del Asbesto en las Escuelas](#) (24 p., 1.16MB)

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