Asbestos

What is asbestos and how is it harmful?

Asbestos is a fibrous mineral found in rock and soil. Due to its long and fine structure, asbestos fibers are strong and heat resistant, making it a valuable element in building materials. Asbestos is 1,200 times thinner than human hair, can suspend in the air for a long period of time, and can be easily inhaled if the contaminated material is disturbed. Long-term effects of asbestos inhalation can cause damage to the lungs, leading to diseases such as lung cancer, mesothelioma, and asbestosis. It can take 10-30 years after exposure for symptoms to be perceptible, so it is important to test suspected materials as soon as possible.

Finding and Identifying Asbestos:

Asbestos fibers may be found in:
- Attic and wall insulation
- Vinyl floor tiles and vinyl sheet flooring
- Roofing and siding shingles
- Textured paint
- Walls and floors around wood-burning stoves
- Hot water and steam pipes
- Heat-resistant fabrics
- Oil and coal furnaces and door gaskets
- Automobile clutches and brakes

The only way to accurately identify asbestos is to conduct a laboratory analysis of the suspected material. Always err on the side of caution. If you suspect there could be asbestos in your home or workplace, have the material analyzed immediately.

More information can be found at:
www.epa.gov/asbestos
www.pca.state.mn.us/waste/asbestos-home-faqs
www.health.state.mn.us/divs/eh/asbestos/homeowner/index.html

Take Action:

- If you suspect asbestos has gotten into the air, close off the contaminated room(s) and any windows, air ducts, or door drafts.
- The safest way to procure a sample of the suspected material is with the help of asbestos professionals who are trained in retrieving a sample without dispersing any fibers into the air.
- Most asbestos-containing material can be taken care of with repairs, as removal would require disturbing the material and releasing fibers into the air.
- Contact the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency at (651) 296-6300 or (800) 657-3864 for a list of contractors licensed in asbestos repair and/or removal.