
Asbestos Awareness in Older Buildings

1.0 Objective & Intent

The objective of this SOP is to provide all personnel with the knowledge and procedures necessary to identify potential asbestos-containing materials (ACMs) in buildings constructed prior to 1990, and to prevent exposure through proper recognition, avoidance, and reporting. Asbestos is a known carcinogen that can cause serious respiratory diseases, including asbestosis, lung cancer, and mesothelioma. This procedure ensures compliance with WorkSafeBC regulations (OHS Regulation Part 6, Substance Specific Requirements) and mitigates the risk of inadvertent disturbance and exposure during renovation, maintenance, or demolition activities.

2.0 Operational Scope

This procedure applies to all employees, contractors, and visitors who may enter or work in any building or structure on company premises that was constructed before 1990. This includes, but is not limited to, maintenance personnel, electricians, plumbers, carpenters, and general labourers. It covers all areas of the facility, including production floors, offices, storage areas, mechanical rooms, and ceiling spaces. This SOP does not cover the removal or abatement of asbestos, which must be performed by a licensed asbestos abatement contractor.

3.0 Hazard Identification & Mandatory PPE

- Inhalation of airborne asbestos fibers is the primary hazard, leading to irreversible lung damage.
- Friable asbestos materials (easily crumbled) pose the highest risk of fiber release.
- Common ACMs include: pipe insulation, boiler insulation, ceiling tiles, vinyl floor tiles, mastics, drywall joint compound, and textured paints.
- Disturbing ACMs through drilling, sanding, cutting, or demolition can release fibers into the air.
- Mandatory PPE for any work in areas with potential ACMs: N95 or higher respirator (fit-tested), disposable coveralls, safety glasses, and gloves.
- CSA-approved steel-toed boots are required for all work in industrial areas.

4.0 Required Safety Equipment & Tools

- Asbestos awareness training certificate (valid within the last 3 years)
- Building asbestos survey report (if available)
- N95 or P100 respirator (fit-tested)
- Disposable Tyvek coveralls
- Safety glasses or goggles
- Disposable gloves
- HEPA vacuum for cleanup (if disturbance occurs)
- Warning signs and barrier tape
- Sealable plastic bags for waste disposal

5.0 Step-by-Step Safety Procedure

1. Before entering any building constructed before 1990, review the building's asbestos survey report (if available) to identify known locations of ACMs.
2. If no survey is available, assume all suspect materials (e.g., pipe insulation, ceiling tiles, floor tiles) contain asbestos until proven otherwise.
3. Visually inspect the work area for any damaged or deteriorating materials that may contain asbestos. Do not touch or disturb any suspect material.
4. If suspect ACMs are identified, immediately stop work and cordon off the area with barrier tape and warning signs. Notify your supervisor and the safety officer.
5. Do not perform any drilling, cutting, sanding, or demolition on any suspect material. Only a licensed asbestos abatement contractor may sample or remove ACMs.
6. If you accidentally disturb a suspect material (e.g., break a ceiling tile), immediately stop all work, evacuate the area, and seal off the space. Do not attempt to clean up the debris yourself.
7. Report any disturbance to your supervisor and the safety officer immediately. They will arrange for air monitoring and professional abatement if necessary.
8. If you must work near known ACMs (e.g., running a cable near asbestos pipe insulation), ensure the material is intact and not friable. Use a HEPA vacuum to clean the area before and after work, and wear the required PPE.
9. After any work in a potential asbestos area, remove PPE carefully to avoid spreading fibers. Dispose of disposable PPE in a sealed plastic bag labeled 'Asbestos Waste'.
10. Wash hands and face thoroughly after removing PPE. Do not eat, drink, or smoke in areas where asbestos may be present.

Regulatory Disclaimer: This document is a generic safety template provided for educational and informational purposes only. It does not constitute professional engineering, legal, or regulatory compliance advice. The end-user assumes all liability for validating all safety protocols against specific machinery manufacturer manuals and local occupational health and safety regulations (e.g., WorkSafeBC, CSA standards) before deployment.