

Asbestos and Carpet: What Is the Connection?

Attention flooring sales and installation employers, contractors and subcontractors, building owners, and recyclers of used flooring materials:

Carpet does not normally contain asbestos; however, employees who **remove** carpet glued to asbestos-containing flooring materials potentially can breathe in hazardous asbestos fibers when the asbestos-containing materials get torn, cut, or broken during the removal job. Employees who **install** carpeting potentially can be exposed to asbestos fibers when disturbing residual asbestos-containing flooring during surface preparations. Such exposures can be dangerous; asbestos causes cancer and other serious diseases in people years after exposure and has no known safe exposure level.



VAT debris rolled up in carpeting

You can't always see airborne asbestos fibers, which quickly circulate throughout an area and can remain suspended for hours or days, depending on their size. And, once carpet has become contaminated with asbestos, it can't be decontaminated or recycled. Others who subsequently handle or process the contaminated carpet rolls or waste will also be exposed to asbestos.

What types of flooring materials should I look out for?

When you encounter the following flooring materials in buildings constructed before 1981, **presume asbestos is present:**

- Vinyl asbestos tiles (VAT) – Asbestos was mixed into the tile material to add tensile strength.
- Backing on sheet flooring (linoleum or roll vinyl) – Asbestos is in the felt backing, not the top surface of the flooring. The felt is easily damaged during removal and releases significant quantities of asbestos fiber when disturbed.
- Adhesives and mastics – Asbestos was mixed into these products to make them flow better on subflooring.

Flooring materials in buildings constructed in 1981 or later can still contain asbestos, so testing may be necessary to keep employees safe. You don't have to test for asbestos if you presume it is present and handle the material as asbestos.

If you decide to do testing to confirm whether a material does or does not contain asbestos, you must use an AHERA-accredited building inspector. AHERA is the Asbestos Hazard Emergency Response Act of 1986 (15 USC).

What else can I do to protect employees?

If employees remove, install, dispose of, or recycle carpeting, follow these steps to keep them safe from asbestos exposure:

1. Identify asbestos before you start a job.
 - When you discover carpet that is glued to flooring, get asbestos survey information from the building owner as required by [WAC 296-62-07721](#) to identify asbestos.
 - If employees will handle carpet removed by someone else or disturb debris from a removal job, follow up with the building owner or renovation contractor to find out if the material contains asbestos.
2. If you suspect or confirm that asbestos is present, you may not want to take on the job and risk exposure to employees.



Even if you don't accept these jobs, your employees need proper training to avoid potential exposure. For example:

- Instruct employees on what to look for and how to get dependable information about flooring materials they suspect contain asbestos.
- Tell employees they can't enter or remain in work areas where asbestos is being disturbed.
- Inform employees to leave used carpet rolls and waste alone when they suspect asbestos contamination.

3. **If you decide to accept jobs where asbestos exposure could occur, you must follow applicable requirements in Chapter 296-62 WAC, Part I-1 and Chapter 296-65 WAC.**

Make sure employees, including employees who clean up contaminated flooring debris:

- Have had the specified level of training and certification required for such work.
- Are prepared to work safely by using the required work practices and personal protective equipment, **before they start the job**.

Follow job notification requirements established by your local air quality control agency, if applicable.

4. If your employees remove carpet stuck to asbestos-containing flooring materials, inform other employers and employees who may have contact with these materials as a result of your activities. For example:

- Tell those who plan to sweep the area or haul away removed carpeting that there is, or may be, asbestos contamination so they can take proper precautions.
- Make sure contaminated carpet rolls and other asbestos waste materials are properly labeled so crews can handle them safely.

5. Follow labeling and other requirements for asbestos waste found in WAC 296-62-07721 through 07723.

6. Share this Hazard Alert with other employers, employees, and building owners to help bring more attention to this serious hazard.

Other resources

- For free training materials, rule information, and other resources that pertain to asbestos, visit www.Lni.wa.gov/Safety-health/safety-topics/search-by-topic?query=asbestos.
- To find companies who are certified to take samples and test for asbestos, check your local phone book's yellow pages under "Asbestos".
- To find contact information for your local air quality agency, visit the Washington State [Department of Ecology](#)

How can I get help from the Department of Labor & Industries (L&I)?

L&I provides consultations, training, and technical assistance at no cost to employers. Call today to schedule a confidential consultation or go to [Request Consultation](#) for more information. You may also call 1-800-4BE-SAFE (1-800-423-7233) or visit a local L&I office and ask for the consultation supervisor.