Asbestos FAQs

What is asbestos?

Asbestos is the name given to a group of minerals that occur naturally in the environment as bundles of fibres that can be separated into thin, durable threads. These fibres are resistant to heat, fire, and chemicals and do not conduct electricity. For these reasons, asbestos has been historically used widely in many industries.

Chemically, asbestos minerals are silicate compounds, meaning they contain atoms of silicon and oxygen in their molecular structure. Asbestos minerals are divided into two major groups: serpentine asbestos and amphibole asbestos. Serpentine asbestos includes the mineral chrysotile, which has long, curly fibres that can be woven. Chrysotile asbestos is the form that has been used most widely in commercial applications. Amphibole asbestos includes the minerals actinolite, tremolite, anthophyllite, crocidolite, and amosite. Amphibole asbestos has straight, needle-like fibres that are more brittle than those of serpentine asbestos and are more limited in their ability to be fabricated.

What are the health hazards of exposure to asbestos?

People can be exposed to asbestos by environmental contamination, in community buildings, in their workplaces or in their homes. If products containing asbestos are disturbed, tiny asbestos fibres are released into the air. When asbestos fibres are breathed in, they may get trapped in the lungs and remain there for a long time. Over time, these fibres can accumulate and cause scarring and inflammation, which can affect breathing and lead to serious health problems.

What is the University doing to ensure that health risks related to asbestos are addressed?

The University of Regina is committed to ensuring that we provide a safe and healthy work and learning environment for employees, students and visitors to our campuses.

Since 1987 we have maintained records of asbestos containing material (ACM) in our buildings; we have developed asbestos management procedures; addressed all areas where ACM posed an immediate health risk; and created an electronic database.

The database assists staff members who are carrying out maintenance, renovations or other projects. The database is continuously updated with project specific sample results and is also used to develop inventory lists for an annual condition assessment to ensure ACM material requiring treatment is addressed in a timely manner.
In 2017, the University will be conducting another comprehensive facilities assessment of buildings constructed prior to 1990 to ensure the database is up to date and to incorporate the Language Institute, which was not previously assessed.

The long-term goal is to safely remove all ACM from buildings across campus as required during future renovations.

**Why was the Language Institute not included in previous assessments?**

Health Canada’s indoor air quality guidelines previously stated that asbestos was used in buildings and homes prior to 1985. This statement has been recently updated to say it was used prior to 1990. Therefore, we will be including the Language Institute, which was constructed in the late 1980’s, in the next asbestos audit to determine if there are ACM present in that building.

**What is the time frame for removing all asbestos from campus?**

ACM that may pose risk of exposure is removed immediately. ACM that is encapsulated or bound with other materials does not pose an immediate threat and will be removed through future renovations as required.

**Which University of Regina buildings contain asbestos?**

Buildings constructed prior to 1985, required assessment. Buildings built after 1985, were deemed non-asbestos containing according to Health Canada guidelines at that time. The following locations were inspected and included in our 2012 ACM report.

**College Avenue Campus**
- Darke Hall
- Gallery Building
- Conservatory Building
- College Building

**University of Regina’s Main Campus**
- Laboratory Building
- Classroom Building
- Dr. John Archer Library
- Administration-Humanities Building
- Campion College
- Centre for Kinesiology, Health and Sport
- Heating Plant
- Maintenance Building
- Education Building
- Technology Development Facility
- College West Building
The ACM report is available at:
https://www.uregina.ca/hr/hsw/assets/docs/pdf/Employee-Safety/asbestos-inventory.pdf.

All asbestos found during the 2012 assessment process that may have posed risk has been safely and effectively managed. The remainder did not pose risk as asbestos is safe if it remains undamaged or undisturbed in such a way that it does not release fibres into the air. An annual condition assessment of these ACM areas is conducted to ensure the ACM is still in a secure state and does not require treatment.

**New areas of ACM have been identified in buildings that were previously assessed in 2012. How could the assessment not have identified these areas of ACM?**

The goal of the 2012 assessment was to evaluate a representative sample of the various materials used in our building inventory. Sampling was completed according to industry standards. Given the large number of buildings assessed and the numerous alterations and renovations that have occurred in these buildings some ACM escaped detection.

**Where and when was the new ACM found?**

Through project specific sampling, ACM was discovered in the ceiling tiles in the Education Building on April 24, 2017.

**Could asbestos be distributed through a building by the ventilation system?**

The ventilation systems in these buildings are not designed to remove airborne asbestos particles. However, based on asbestos related training and consultation with industry experts the University believes the health risk related to airborne asbestos exposure in these buildings is minimal.

**How does the University minimize the risk of asbestos exposure when work is being done on ACM?**

The University has developed asbestos management procedures to ensure the proper handling of ACM that are in accordance with the Ministry of Labour and Workplace Safety requirements. These procedures are available at: https://www.uregina.ca/hr/hsw/general_safety/asbestos-containing-materials.html.

**How can you be sure there are no other areas in these buildings that have ACM that haven’t been identified?**

We will be conducting an immediate assessment of the Education Building to determine if there are other areas of ACM that has not been previously identified in that building. In addition, a supplementary assessment of all buildings constructed prior to 1990 will be completed by December 2017.
How is asbestos regulated?

The Ministry of Labour Relations and Workplace Safety enforces the Saskatchewan Employment Act and associated Regulations, governing how to safely work with and around asbestos containing materials.

What was the 2012 audit process?

Bersch & Associates Ltd. conducted assessments of all ACM identified facilities. These facilities were marked with labels placed on the main door frame into all rooms. Materials such as mechanical piping are clearly marked with larger labels or stenciled letters if asbestos was found.

What does the labeling system look like?

A label (see below) has been placed on interior doors of all building constructed prior to 1985. The label is white with 4 boxes that have acronyms. For example, if nothing was detected it would have “N/D” on the label.

What do the labels mean?

The acronyms in the white boxes would indicate where asbestos is located in the room.
Am I at risk?

In many of the University’s buildings where asbestos may be present, it is bonded into finished products such as walls, tiles and pipes, which poses no significant health risk as long as it is not damaged or disturbed in such a way as to release fibres into the air.

Asbestos is only dangerous when it is airborne. Asbestos particles that break apart or can be crushed in the hand are called friable and can release into the air. These fibres may present health risks if they are inhaled.

What options do faculty, staff and students have if they believe they have been exposed?

If staff, faculty or students feel they may have been exposed to asbestos, they are encouraged to complete a U of R Incident Report Form which can be found at: http://www.uregina.ca/hr/forms/injury-illness.html

A member of the HSW team will follow-up with you once your incident report has been reviewed.

Who can I contact if I have questions or concerns?

Please contact Darren Cherwaty, Director, Health, Safety, & Wellness:
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