

For Homeowners

# Asbestos:

Frequently asked questions for homeowners



Many older homes contain some form of asbestos. Harmful asbestos fibres can be found in over 3,000 household materials. So as a homeowner, you need to get your home tested for asbestos before you start a renovation or demolition project. And if asbestos is found, it must be properly removed or contained before the project can begin.

As of January 1, 2024, asbestos abatement contractors must be licensed to operate in B.C., and workers performing asbestos abatement work must be trained and certified. This pamphlet outlines what you need to know about hiring companies to test for asbestos and remove or contain it. It also covers the questions you should ask to make sure the work is done safely.

## Test for asbestos

### How do I find a licensed asbestos survey company to do asbestos testing?

WorkSafeBC has a list of asbestos survey companies licensed to perform asbestos testing. Visit [worksafebc.com/asbestos-certification-licensing](https://worksafebc.com/asbestos-certification-licensing).

### What questions should I ask the company?

- Do you hold a valid asbestos abatement licence?
- Do your workers hold valid certificates to perform asbestos testing?
- Do you have a business licence issued by my local government?
- Are you insured (e.g., with liability insurance)? Are you bonded?



- Do you have an exposure control program and a respirator program to protect your workers?
- What lab do you use to analyze the samples you take? Is the lab accredited to do asbestos testing?
- Can I see a sample of one of your reports?

### What documentation should I expect from the company?

You should get an asbestos survey report that identifies any asbestos-containing materials in your home. The report should include the original lab results and a complete description of the asbestos-containing materials that have to be removed. The following should be included in the report:

- Date of the survey.
- Company name and surveyor's name.
- Address of the home.
- Description of the home (basic construction, square footage, how many floors, age, description of any recent renovations, etc.).
- Description of the building materials used in each room of the home (e.g., what is on the floors, walls, and ceilings) and on the exterior (siding, roofing, window putty, etc.).
- Sampling locations (which room; which wall, floor, ceiling, etc.) and the materials collected (e.g., drywall, floor tile).

- Number of building material samples taken. There should be 18 to 25 bulk samples collected from a typical home. If not, the report should explain why fewer samples were collected.
- Name of the lab and the analytical method used (e.g., NIOSH 9002, EPA 600).
- Laboratory results (original lab results, not just a brief description). These should identify whether or not asbestos is present in the materials collected, the type of asbestos, and the percentage. Materials listed as “less than 0.5%” or “trace” (etc.) must be considered asbestos-containing unless additional lab methods were used to determine the exact percentage.
- A list of the quantity of asbestos-containing materials that must be removed if they are going to be disturbed during renovations. For example, “all walls and ceilings in the living room and kitchen,” or “all of the flooring in the kitchen and bathrooms.”

If the entire home will be demolished, all asbestos-containing materials must be sampled and identified. If only some areas will be renovated, only those need to be surveyed. It is important to identify all materials that will be disturbed. Otherwise, asbestos fibres may be spread throughout your home.

## Remove asbestos

### How do I find a licensed contractor to do the asbestos removal (abatement)?

WorkSafeBC has a list of asbestos abatement contractors licensed to perform asbestos removal. Visit [worksafebc.com/asbestos-certification-licensing](https://www.worksafebc.com/asbestos-certification-licensing).

### How can I find out if contractors have appropriate training and certification for the work they're doing?

Asbestos abatement companies must be licensed, and their supervisors and workers must be certified. Asbestos surveyors must have valid asbestos certificates.



### What questions should I ask the contractor?

- Do you hold a valid asbestos abatement licence?
- Do your workers hold valid certificates to perform asbestos removal work?
- Are you insured (e.g., errors and omissions insurance, liability insurance)? Are you bonded?
- Do you have a business licence issued by my local government?

### What else do I need to know?

#### Should the contractor doing the air quality monitoring be different from the one that's doing the asbestos removal?

Yes. Sampling for airborne asbestos fibres during an abatement project should be performed by a third-party qualified person.

The qualified person should not be an employee of the abatement contractor. Air monitoring technicians should be employees of an asbestos laboratory or an asbestos consulting agency. It is not an accepted industry practice for asbestos abatement contractors to do their own air monitoring.

### Do I need a permit from my local government?

You will need a permit from your local government for demolition or significant renovation work. The requirements vary between municipalities, so you will need to consult with local government staff to find out what you need.

### What is a clearance letter? Do I need one after the asbestos is removed?

A clearance letter is a document used by industry to tell clients or other stakeholders, such as demolition contractors, that the asbestos has been safely removed or contained.

Before your local government issues a permit, they may require a clearance letter from the asbestos survey company or the asbestos abatement contractor. The letter should include the following information:

- Current date
- Date the asbestos abatement was completed
- Address of the abatement project
- Name of the abatement contractor
- Description of the scope of work that was performed (e.g., what was removed and when)
- Reference to the hazardous materials survey (including the name of the surveyor or company and when the survey was conducted)
- Number of the notice of project (NOP) form submitted to WorkSafeBC

- Waste manifest documentation
- Name of the person who performed the final visual inspection
- A statement indicating that the abatement was conducted in accordance with both the Occupational Health and Safety Regulation and the B.C. Ministry of Environment regulations
- Name and signature of the person who collected the air clearance samples

You can request a clearance letter from the asbestos survey company or the contractor even if you did not need a permit for your renovation.

### Will I need to be out of my home during asbestos removal?

It depends on the amount of work required and the rooms affected. Rooms may be completely sealed off while asbestos is being removed. There would be no risk of exposure to asbestos as long as the proper controls are in place, but you would not be able to access or use those rooms.

## For more information

For more resources for homeowners on preventing asbestos exposure, visit [thinkasbestos.com](http://thinkasbestos.com).

To report an unsafe condition or situation in a B.C. workplace, please call our Prevention Information Line at 604.276.3100, or toll-free at 1.888.621.7233.

A printed version of this publication is available from the WorkSafeBC bookstore.