

## **Hurricane Preparedness – The Threat of Asbestos Exposure After a Hurricane**

The height of hurricane season can quickly inspire residents within hurricane-prone regions of the United States to prepare for the possibility of a disastrous storm by stocking up on food supplies, water and gasoline resources, as well as materials to reinforce and protect homes. Unfortunately, not many are aware of the eminent threat of asbestos exposure in the wake of a destructive hurricane, and as a result do not know how to prepare or deal with the risk of exposure once a storm has passed.

In an effort to provide the public with valuable information on how to prepare homes and safely deal with the threat of asbestos exposure, the Mesothelioma Cancer Center has created an informative section on their website that specifically addresses [asbestos exposure and hurricanes](#), as well as other natural disasters.

### **Natural Disasters and Asbestos Exposure**

Some of the biggest concerns after a natural disaster include availability of water and electricity, road access, and cleanup efforts, as well as financial, environmental, and human losses. Emergency management crews are trained to handle a vast variety of events and potential hazards, but few are trained on how to handle the threat of asbestos exposure in the wake of a natural disaster.

Countless products in schools, homes, theaters, office buildings, industrial and commercial sites, and other structures are known to contain asbestos. When left intact and in good condition, these products pose little to no harm. But once they are disturbed by a natural disaster, the contaminated products can release toxic asbestos fibers into the air and water supply.

After a natural disaster like that of a hurricane or tornado, restoring damaged areas to pre-disaster conditions often involves removing or repairing damaged structures. Tornadoes and hurricanes are considered some of the most damaging natural disasters on the planet, and these natural occurrences can damage lingering asbestos-contaminated materials and pose a serious health risk to the public.

Those who are concerned that asbestos-containing materials could be in their home should:

- Be cautious when inspecting their residence and careful not to disturb any potential threats
- Fully wet down any suspicious materials (this helps to keep asbestos fibers from becoming airborne)
- Wear protective gear, including clothes, boots, gloves, and HEPA filter masks if working around potential asbestos-containing materials
- Contact a licensed professional abatement contractor to inspect the home
- Know that any repairs or abatement efforts should be carried out by the professional, as it is tedious and expensive to purchase all the supplies and safety measures required to securely perform the abatement.

### **Where to Spot and How to Avoid Asbestos**

Knowing where to find and how to spot asbestos is essential in avoiding this toxic substance.

Throughout the late 1800s, momentous innovation in the application of asbestos was seen in an array of

products. By the 1930s, the United States experienced a boom in asbestos usage, which peaked in the '60s and '70s and quickly dropped as evidence of its hazard to human health emerged. An exceptional insulator, asbestos was valued for its heat and fire resistance. In fact, asbestos was so praised that more than 3,000 products are estimated to have contained asbestos.

Finding a home in a number of industries, asbestos was frequently used in trains, ships and shipyards, textiles, automobiles, and construction materials, to name a few. The poisonous chemical was most commonly utilized for insulation purposes in residential, commercial and public buildings, boiler and engine rooms aboard ships and trains, and performed as an excellent protective covering on pipes and plumbing. Clearly, the construction industry found many uses for asbestos, as it was applied in construction materials such as floor and ceiling tiles, adhesives, cements, siding, roofing, pipeline wrap, and shingles.



Asbestos tiles



Asbestos siding

Since most structures built before the 1980s contain asbestos, it is important to know the common places to find asbestos in order to spot and avoid exposure. Spotting asbestos products that are not clearly labeled is practically impossible with the human eye, so testing is the only way to know if a product contains asbestos. Make sure not to sample the product yourself, which comes with the risk of releasing asbestos fibers into the air. Rather, hire a professional to take a sample for testing. Some possible sources of asbestos in homes include the following:

- Roofing
- Ceiling materials
- Certain types of flooring
- Asbestos siding
- Acoustical plaster

- Insulation
- Pipe covering
- Caulking, spackle, and sealing
- Plumbing
- Asbestos paneling
- Paint



Asbestos cement roofing shingles



Asbestos pipe insulation

### **How to Handle It Safely**

Since asbestos is readily broken into tiny particles when exposed, handling this material can lead to asbestos fibers being released into the atmosphere. For this reason, it is best not to handle asbestos at all, because there is no safe way for a nonprofessional to collect and dispose of the hazardous material. If asbestos is in your home, all testing, remediation, and abatement of asbestos should be done by a licensed professional.

### **Methods of Asbestos Remediation**

Most importantly, to guarantee the greatest in safety for yourself and your family, you must hire a professional for all asbestos repairs and removal. If fully replacing asbestos materials is not yet an affordable option, have a professional seal off the asbestos-contaminated product until removal is a realistic option. The situation become more serious if the contaminated product is damaged or worn and should be quickly repaired or replaced.

There are four typical ways to deal with asbestos in domestic homes, including

- Enclosure: Enclosing asbestos-containing material involves the building of a box around the area, theoretically preventing damaged asbestos particles from entering the atmosphere.

- Encapsulation: Though this may sound and logically seem a lot like enclosure, however, the processes are very different. This method involves the application of an acrylic substance with a sprayer over the asbestos material.
- Repair: Repair of damaged asbestos-containing products presents a serious exposure risk, since damaged asbestos materials release fibers during the repair process. This method is best done by a licensed professional to avoid preventable exposure.
- Removal: This method fully removes and replaces the asbestos-contaminated materials. Since this method of remediation presents the greatest threat of asbestos exposure, hiring an experience professional is highly recommended.

### **Risks and Dangers of Asbestos Exposure**

Since the body cannot easily dispose of asbestos fibers, they tend to remain in the body and cause irreparable damage. If an individual experiences repeated exposure, the fibers can build up over time, often creating a fibrous scarring of the lungs. Exposure to this toxic mineral can lead to a range of deadly diseases, such as asbestosis, lung cancer, and mesothelioma cancer.

Asbestosis is a chronic and progressive lung disorder that causes shortness of breath and culminates in respiratory failure or develops into cancer. [Mesothelioma](#) is a rare and aggressive form of cancer that affects the body's mesothelial cells and has a very low rate of cure. The most common form of the cancer affects the mesothelial lining of the lungs, known as [pleural mesothelioma](#).

The only way to avoid the development of such incurable diseases is to avoid exposure to asbestos at all costs. Knowing where asbestos exposure can occur and how to protect yourself from the toxic fibers is essential in preventing asbestos-related disease. If you suspect your home is contaminated with asbestos, you are advised to contact a licensed asbestos abatement contractor for a safe and detailed inspection.

For more resources on asbestos, the various forms of asbestos cancer, and other illnesses caused by asbestos exposure, please visit [Asbestos.com](#).