

Inspector's Notes

January 2019

Asbestos?

A question I'm often asked with older homes is "is that asbestos?" which is usually followed up with "what do I need to do?". In this edition of Inspector's Notes I'll touch on Asbestos; what it is, where it lurks, and what can be done. Hopefully, this information will allow you to have a more informed discussion with your clients.

Brief history

Asbestos is a cancer causing agent that has a long history dating back to the earliest records of time with archaeologists uncovering Egyptian mummies wrapped in asbestos cloth. It came into use in building materials in the 1850s here in the United States when it was used as a fireproofing material. By 1874 asbestos was being used widely in insulation products. It wasn't until the 1970's that asbestos was finally banned in the United States. That ban was short-lived and in the 1990's asbestos was allowed to be used in small concentrations. Asbestos is still used today in things like brake pads, vinyl tile, roofing materials, and some cement pipe.

Where can I find it?

One of the more common findings is the Asbestos Tape used on HVAC ductwork in older homes. It comes in the form of a white tape wrapped around the joints of the ductwork. In this form the asbestos is relatively harmless as long as it's left alone.

What to do?

It can be encapsulated (covered) to keep it from becoming free-floating. Spray paint is commonly used to coat the surface of the asbestos. Some people use duct tape, though eventually it will degrade and come off.



When is it a problem?

Asbestos becomes a problem when it's friable; free-floating. In the photo to the right you can see where grey duct tape was used to cover the asbestos tape, only to be pulled away exposing the asbestos tape which has become torn and jagged. These jagged edges present friable asbestos which can easily become airborne. At this point the asbestos should be handled by a qualified expert.



Another common area is **Transite** pipe which was used as exhaust ducts for HVAC furnaces. Transite is a cement compound that contains asbestos. In the photo to the left the pipe comes up from the furnace in the basement and exits through the attic. As with the tape, it can be painted over (encapsulated) and only becomes a problem when it becomes damaged and friable. Once friable you'll need an expert to remove it.

Popcorn ceilings, also known as acoustic, or textured ceilings are another place you may find asbestos. The use of asbestos in textured ceilings was banned in 1977. However, just because your house was built pre-1977 doesn't mean the ceiling contains asbestos. The only way to be sure is to have it tested. This can be done by purchasing a kit at your local hardware store or hiring a professional to come in and do it for you. In either case, if you're preparing to work on a popcorn ceiling it's best to get it tested before you start work.

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Do you have a question you've encountered while out in the field? Has your client posed a question you're not familiar with. Is there something on which you'd like to hear more information? Let me know and I'll include it in my monthly newsletter.

If you have a question, you can count on it that others have the same question, so let me hear from you. Email your questions or inquiries to Higher Ground Inspections;

hginpectionsllc@gmail.com or

anthony@highergroundinspections.com.

Answers are always free. I look forward to hearing from you!