1. What is asbestos?

Asbestos is a natural, odourless mineral with unique qualities. It is strong enough to resist high temperatures, chemical effects and wear and it is also a poor conductor; therefore, it will insulate well against heat and electricity. Because of its properties, asbestos was widely used for construction purposes before its harmful health effects became known.

Asbestos exists in various shapes and colours. The most common types of asbestos are the following:

- Chrysotile – this is the most common type of asbestos found in buildings; also known as "white asbestos".
- Amosite – it has been used in thermal insulation and asbestos cement products where greater structural strength is required; also known as "brown asbestos".
- Crocidolite – not as commonly used as the previous two types and has rarely been encountered in University buildings; also known as "blue asbestos".
- Other forms of asbestos – include anthophyllite, tremolite, and actinolite; these are rarely encountered and are found mainly as contaminants in other minerals.

2. What is asbestos used for?

You should not be alarmed or surprised to find out that some materials in your building may contain asbestos. Historically, asbestos was widely used in construction materials for private and public buildings (including hospitals, schools, offices, etc.).

3. What are some common locations of asbestos containing materials?

Common uses of asbestos-containing materials include insulation, wall and ceiling tiles, roofing and flooring products, insulation against fire and sound, laboratory fume hood liners, drywall joint compound in drywall walls, stucco wall plaster, etc.

4. Health risk associated with asbestos

Asbestos poses health risks only when asbestos-containing materials are disturbed or damaged and fibres become airborne and are inhaled by a person. If the asbestos fibres are bound tightly together, such as in commercial materials like floor or ceiling tiles and siding, Health Canada considers that there are no significant health risks. Asbestos only poses a health risk when fibres become airborne and people breathe them in.

Medical experts agree that non-friable asbestos-containing materials pose **no significant health risk** unless they are being drilled, ground, broken, sanded or otherwise worked on.

Risks are greatest for workers in industries that produce and use asbestos, such as mining and milling. These workers can be exposed to asbestos fibres on a regular basis, which results in an impact on their health, depending on the specific circumstances.

Exposure health risks depend on factors such as:

- Concentration of asbestos fibres in the air;
- Duration of exposure;
- Frequency of exposure;
- Size of the asbestos particles inhaled;
- Amount of time since the initial exposure.

The inhalation of asbestos fibres can cause serious diseases of the lungs and other organs. These effects may not appear until years after the exposure has occurred. Asbestos fibres associated with these health risks are too small to be seen with the naked eye, which can make identification difficult. Asbestos fibre exposure can lead to scarring of the lungs that may potentially develop into an increased risk of developing lung cancer, asbestosis (fibrous scarring of the lung tissue), mesothelioma (cancer of the chest cavity lining), and other diseases (including cancer of the lung and lung cavity, esophagus, stomach, colon and pancreas, pleural plaques, pleural thickening and pleural effusion).

5. Reporting procedure

If you have observed an asbestos-containing material that has deteriorated, or has been disturbed, it must be reported to your supervisor. Your supervisor will contact the Building Management Agent and / or Facilities directly at 2222.

Any hazards, whether asbestos-related or not, must be reported to your supervisor, unless there is an immediate threat to life, safety, property or the environment, in which case you must call Protection Services at 5411.

6. Asbestos abatement

The abatement (or removal) of asbestos-containing materials is strictly regulated and controlled under Regulation 278/05 of the Ontario Occupational Health and Safety Act. Handling and/or removal of asbestos-containing materials must only be carried out by licensed professionals in accordance with established standards. In general, when asbestos-containing materials are removed or disturbed, the area must be hermetically separated. The work procedures employed are designed to minimize fibrous release. In some circumstances, air quality sampling is performed inside and outside the work area to ensure fibrous release is kept as low as possible.

7. Where has asbestos-containing materials been identified at uOttawa?

In 1992, an asbestos site assessment was performed and the Dames and Moore Report was prepared that identified a list of locations around the campus that contained asbestos. In accordance with the amended legislation, a complete inventory of asbestos-containing material locations at the University of Ottawa was completed (October 2007). Reports and updates are available from Facilities.

Today, prior to any construction, renovation or maintenance operations, these reports are consulted. Where necessary, sampling and further inspections are performed to anticipate and manage possible asbestos-containing materials.

8. What is the University's policy on protecting workers and students?

The University of Ottawa is responsible to provide a safe and healthy environment free from avoidable or significant risks of serious injuries or illnesses associated with exposure to asbestos fibres. This responsibility is implemented through the Asbestos Management Program developed by the University.

9. How do I find out about ongoing asbestos-related operations?

Before any construction, renovation or maintenance operations that may disturb asbestos-containing material can commence, work must be approved and managed by Facilities. Project with asbestos-related implications must be communicated to the appropriate personnel prior to their commencement.

10. Who has the information concerning asbestos-containing material inspections?

Facilities manages the process and maintain the information relating to the asbestos-containing material inspections that have been carried out on campus.

11. What kind of protection do I require if there are renovations or operations being carried out in my building?

If asbestos-containing material has been identified and there is a risk that the construction, renovation or maintenance procedures might disturb the material, the work area will be hermetically separated from the rest of the workplace by walls or other suitable means. Construction workers who do (or may) come into direct contact with the ACM are trained for this scenario and wear the required personal protective equipment. Workers and students working in or visiting the building do not need to wear any personal protective equipment, as the work area will be hermetically separated from the building (including ventilation, when required).

12. Is there an information or training workshop related to asbestos?

Asbestos operations training courses are organized on demand. These courses are open to Facilities personnel and other workers who may come in contact with asbestos-containing materials. Awareness workshops are also available for workers and personnel coordinating work within their Faculty / Service. For more information concerning worker training, please consult the course registration website or contact the Office of Risk Management.

13. Who should you contact if you have any health concerns?

If you have any health related concerns, please contact the Health and Wellness Office at ext. 1473 or by email at santerh@uOttawa.ca.

You may also contact the Office of Risk Management at ext. 5892 or at safety@uottawa.ca. You can also consult your Functional Occupational Health and Safety Committee.

14. Additional information

- Health Canada
- Ontario Regulation 278/05 – Asbestos on Construction Projects and in Buildings and Repair Operation