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Fact Sheet
South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control • www.scdhec.gov

Asbestos

What is it?
Asbestos is a mineral. It is made up of long, thin fibrous material.

Where can it be found?
- Building materials (ceiling tiles, floor tiles, insulation)
- Paper products (used as insulation, woodburning stoves)
- Asbestos-cement products (roofing materials, shingles, and siding)
- Packings and gaskets (wood stove door gaskets)
- Car brake pads and linings

What are the potential health effects of asbestos?
- Asbestosis (a lung disease)
- Heart disease
- Immune system damage
- Lung cancer
- Stomach cancer

Why has asbestos use been so widespread?
Asbestos has been used so frequently in the past because it is strong and flexible and it will not burn. It is also a good insulator and resists corrosion. Asbestos has been used widely to fireproof, insulate, soundproof, and decorate. Currently the use of asbestos in the United States is declining.

How are people exposed to asbestos?
When asbestos fibers are in the air, people breathe them. Since they are small and light, the asbestos fibers can stay in the air for a long time. Damaged and dry asbestos, sometimes referred to as friable, is more likely to be released into the air. Fibers may become airborne if damaged asbestos material is moved.

What can you do to protect yourself from asbestos?
- It is best to leave asbestos material that is in good condition alone. Asbestos containing material in good condition will usually not release asbestos fibers into the air.
- Don't play in piles of debris that may contain construction materials.
- Don't touch damaged or broken floor tiles or ceiling tiles.

For more information, visit: http://www.scdhec.gov/Asbestos
http://www.epa.gov/iaq/asbestos.html

DHEC's Bureau of Air Quality, Innovations Section provides information on environmental topics. Readers are encouraged to reproduce this material. For more information about air quality issues, please call (803) 898-4123 or visit our website at www.scdhec.gov/baq. Please send written correspondence to: DHEC's Bureau of Air Quality, Innovations Section, 2600 Bull Street, Columbia, SC 29201.

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CR-008066 4/11