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## University of Guelph Asbestos FAQs

### [Q: What is asbestos?](#)

A: The term asbestos refers to a group of naturally occurring, odourless, mineral silicates that differ in chemical composition and are characterized by long, thin fibres that can be easily separated.

### [Q: What is asbestos used for?](#)

A: You should not be alarmed or surprised to find out that some materials in your building may contain asbestos. Due to its unique properties (it is strong enough to resist high temperatures, chemical effects, and wear; and it is also a poor conductor; therefore, it insulates well against heat and electricity), asbestos was widely used in construction materials for private and public buildings. This includes hospitals, schools, offices etc. Historically, asbestos was used in construction of these buildings before its harmful health effects became known.

### [Q: What are some common locations of asbestos containing materials?](#)

A: While many new building-material installations are asbestos-free, there is a legacy of asbestos-containing materials in many buildings, including those at the University, particularly those built before the early 1980s. 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. More specifically asbestos-containing materials in University buildings may include:

- Sprayed fireproofing used to maintain the fire integrity of structural steelwork in buildings
- Thermal insulation used as lagging for boilers, heaters, pipes, and hot water tanks
- Acoustic or decorative finishes applied to ceilings and walls
- Vermiculite insulation (e.g., Zonolite-brand) used as loose fill insulation inside masonry block walls of buildings
- Asbestos-cement sheets used for roofing and cladding of buildings, decorative and acoustic paneling, laboratory table tops and internal sidings for fume hoods and ovens
- Asbestos- cement pipe used for electric and telephone conduits, water supply, sewage, irrigation, and drainage applications
- Asbestos floor coverings (vinyl tiles and vinyl sheet flooring)
- Acoustic ceiling tiles
- Paper and felt products including roofing felts, gaskets, pipeline wrap, table pads, heat protective mats and appliance insulation applications
- Asbestos textile products including gaskets, thermal and electric insulation, welding curtains and protective clothing.
- Coatings, sealants and adhesives including roofing, wall-treating compounds and “gap” and “hole” fillers.

### [Q: What are friable versus non-friable materials?](#)

A: Some of the above asbestos containing materials are friable, meaning that when dry they can be crumbled or powdered by hand pressure, thereby releasing asbestos fibres into the air where they can be inhaled. Examples of

friable materials include sprayed fireproofing on structural steelwork, thermal insulation on mechanical systems, acoustic or decorative finishes on walls and ceilings and vermiculite insulation used in masonry block walls. These asbestos-containing materials can present greater risk if appropriate precautions are not taken when maintenance or renovation work is performed that results in their disturbance. Other asbestos-containing products are generally considered to be non-friable meaning fibres are firmly embedded in a liquid or solid material and are unlikely to be released during normal use. Examples include asbestos cement products, vinyl-asbestos floor tiles and acoustic ceiling tiles. If the asbestos fibres are bound tightly together, such as in commercial materials like floor or ceiling tiles, [Health Canada](#) [1] considers that there are no significant health risks. The risk posed to building occupants by the mere presence of friable asbestos-containing materials such as sprayed fireproofing and thermal insulation is not significant. After years of study and research, this was one of the conclusions of the *Royal Commission on Matters of Health and Safety Arising from Use of Asbestos in Ontario* (established by the Ontario Government in the 1980's). Other more recent studies have substantiated this conclusion.

### [Q: Are there health risks associated with asbestos?](#)

A: Asbestos fibres are present in the natural environment in both air and water. The average person will inhale between [one and two million fibres](#) [2] per year. There is no evidence that this low-level ambient exposure to asbestos causes any ill effects. According to the [National Cancer Institute](#) [3], low levels of asbestos are present in the air, water, and soil. However, most people do not become ill from their exposure. People who become ill from asbestos are usually those who are exposed to it on a regular basis, most often in a job where they work directly with the material or through substantial environmental contact.

Thus, the mere presence of asbestos containing materials in buildings does not constitute a hazard. Asbestos poses health risks only when asbestos-containing materials are disturbed or damaged and fibres become airborne and are inhaled by a person.

Generally, adverse health effects from asbestos are the result of long-term exposure to high concentrations of airborne fibers, typically associated with work in industries that produce and use asbestos such as mining and milling, and in asbestos-containing building repair, renovation, and maintenance operations. Asbestosis (fibrosis of the lungs), mesothelioma (cancer of the pleural lining of the lungs) and lung cancer; all can be caused by the long-term inhalation of airborne asbestos. For each disease there is a long period of latency, usually 20 to 40 years, between first exposure to asbestos and the appearance of the disease.

### [Q: How do I report an asbestos related concern?](#)

A: If you observe suspected asbestos-containing material that is damaged, leave the area and immediately and promptly report it to your Supervisor, or other University person of authority, or if a student/family living in on-campus housing report it to the Residence Desk so that it can be properly inspected and repaired. Damaged materials must be reported to the Physical Resources Work Order Desk for the Guelph Campus or to Facilities Management for the Ridgetown Campus and Research Centres. Report health and safety or potential asbestos exposure concerns to your Supervisor or other University person of authority. Follow the University's [Incident and Injury Reporting Process](#) [4] and complete the [Illness or Incident Reporting Form](#) [4]. Any hazards, whether asbestos-related or not, must be reported to your Supervisor or other University person in authority, unless there is an immediate threat to life, safety, property, or the environment, in which case you must call the Guelph Campus Safety Office at extension 52000 or 911.

### [Q: How is asbestos abated?](#)

A: The abatement (or removal) of asbestos-containing materials is strictly regulated and controlled under [Regulation 278/05](#) [5] of the [Ontario Occupational Health and Safety Act](#) [6]. Handling and/or removal of asbestos-containing materials must only be carried out by qualified professionals in accordance with established standards. The work procedures employed are intended to limit the release and dispersion of airborne fibres. The University

engages qualified third-party abatement contractors for all asbestos abatement work.

### **Q: Where has asbestos-containing materials (ACM) been identified at the University of Guelph?**

A: Asbestos assessments have been conducted by a third-party consultant for the University who prepared reports and an associated asbestos inventory database that identified locations of asbestos-containing materials in buildings at the University of Guelph. In accordance with regulation and as part of long-term management of ACM, the inventory lists ACM locations in buildings at the University and is updated as new information on construction and abatement activities becomes available. Prior to any construction, renovation or maintenance operations, the inventory is consulted. In accordance with regulatory requirements and when necessary, sampling, and further inspections are performed to anticipate and manage possible asbestos-containing materials. An overview of the asbestos inventory for the Guelph Campus, [Summary of Guelph Campus Buildings with Asbestos Containing Materials](#) [7], is available for the University of Guelph Community.

### **Q: What is the University's policy on protecting workers and students?**

A: The University of Guelph is committed to maintaining a safe work and study environment for faculty, staff, students, visitors, and contractors. It is the policy of the University to have all maintenance, repair or renovation work undertaken using appropriate procedures. To support this, the University has established an [Asbestos Management Program](#). [8]

### **Q: How do I find out about ongoing asbestos-related operations?**

A: Before any construction, renovation or maintenance operations that may disturb asbestos-containing material can commence, work must be approved and managed by Physical Resources for the Guelph Campus and Facilities Management for the Ridgetown Campus and Research Centres. Projects with asbestos-related requirements must be communicated to the appropriate personnel prior to their commencement. Depending on the type of work being performed there may also be notification requirements to the Joint Health and Safety Committee, Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development etc.

### **Q: What kind of protection do I require if there are renovations or operations being carried out in my building?**

A: Construction, renovation, or maintenance that may disturb asbestos-containing materials are done in accordance with asbestos operation requirements under O. Reg. 278/05. Depending on the type of materials, quantities and tools that may be used, the work is classified as a Type 1, 2 or 3 operation and the appropriate procedures will be followed. Depending on the type of operation, this may include using enclosures impervious to asbestos, drop sheets, disabling mechanical ventilation system, sealing ventilation ducts to and from the work area, cleaning procedures, etc. to prevent the spread of dust from the work area. Asbestos abatement is conducted by qualified abatement contractors who are trained to wear the required personal protective equipment and in the proper work procedures. Faculty, staff, and students working in or visiting the building do not need to wear any personal protective equipment, as the work area will be separated from the building occupants. If there is a concern or risk of exposure, occupants will be re-located. Faculty, staff, and students must abide by all signage that is posted in the area.

### **Q: Is there an information or training workshop related to asbestos?**

A: The University will provide instruction and training to those University of Guelph workers who may carry out work

in close proximity and disturb asbestos containing materials in the course of their duties, their Supervisors and those who contract or oversee work that may disturb such materials. As a requirement of Regulation 278/05, all workers who may work with or may disturb asbestos-containing material must be informed of its presence and appropriately trained. Consult with your Supervisor and/or the Asbestos Inventory database prior to beginning work. Further information on asbestos management at the University of Guelph and the Asbestos Management Program is available through the [Environmental Health and Safety](#) [8] website.

### **Q: Who do I contact to make alterations to my workspace/student living space?**

A: Proper procedures must be followed and done by qualified/trained employees or contractors when making changes that may disturb asbestos containing materials. Never drill, cut, saw, break, damage, move or disturb any materials in your workspace, study space or living space that may contain asbestos. This may render the material friable. This includes drilling holes to hang pictures, boards, monitor arms, shelves or installing lab equipment etc. For the Guelph Campus a request should be submitted to the Physical Resources [Work Order Desk](#) [9] and for the Ridgetown Campus the work should be referred to the Manager, Physical Plant.

### **Q: What should I do if I am a student and find damaged or disturbed material that may contain asbestos in my residence building?**

A: If you find damaged or disturbed material that may contain asbestos, leave the area, and report it to staff at the Residence Front Desk.

### **Q: Who should you contact if you have any health concerns?**

A: If you have any health-related concerns, faculty and staff can contact Occupational Health and Wellness at extension 52647 or email [ohw@uoguelph.ca](mailto:ohw@uoguelph.ca) [10], students can contact Student Wellness at extension 52131. If at any time you feel you may have been exposed to damaged or disturbed asbestos containing material notify your Supervisor or other University person of authority. Follow the University's [Incident and Injury Reporting Process](#) [4] and complete the [Illness or Incident Reporting Form](#) [4].

### **Q: Who should you contact if you have any asbestos related questions or concerns in your building?**

A: If you have any question or concerns regarding asbestos in your building, contact:

- Your Supervisor if an employee
- [housing@uoguelph.ca](mailto:housing@uoguelph.ca) [11] if a student/family living in Guelph Campus housing
- [rcmaintenance@uoguelph.ca](mailto:rcmaintenance@uoguelph.ca) [12] if a student living in residence at the Ridgetown Campus
- Environmental Health and Safety at [asbestos@uoguelph.ca](mailto:asbestos@uoguelph.ca) [13]
- The Physical Resources Work Order Desk at [wo@pr.uoguelph.ca](mailto:wo@pr.uoguelph.ca) [9] for the Guelph Campus
- Facilities Management for the Ridgetown Campus and Research Centres

### **Q: Where can I find additional information?**

A: You can find additional information below:

- [University of Guelph Asbestos Management Program](#) [8]
- [Health Canada](#) [1]
- [National Cancer Institute](#) [3]
- [Ontario Regulation 278/05 – Asbestos on Construction Projects and in Buildings and Repair Operation](#) [5]
- [Queen's University-Pinchin Frequently Asked Questions about Asbestos](#) [14]

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**Source URL:** <https://www.uoguelph.ca/hr/university-guelph-asbestos-faqs>

### Links

[1] <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/air-quality/indoor-air-contaminants/health-risks-asbestos.html>  
[2] [https://www.queensu.ca/risk/sites/rsswww/files/uploaded\\_files/EHS/Asbestos/Asbestos%20-%20FAQ's.pdf](https://www.queensu.ca/risk/sites/rsswww/files/uploaded_files/EHS/Asbestos/Asbestos%20-%20FAQ's.pdf) [3] <https://www.cancer.gov/about-cancer/causes-prevention/risk/substances/asbestos/asbestos-fact-sheet#:~:text=Low%20levels%20of%20asbestos%20are%20present%20in%20the,with%20the%20material%20or%20through%20substantial%20environmental%20contact.> [4]  
[https://www.uoguelph.ca/hr/system/files/Incident%20Report%20Form\\_1.pdf](https://www.uoguelph.ca/hr/system/files/Incident%20Report%20Form_1.pdf) [5]  
<https://www.ontario.ca/laws/regulation/050278> [6] <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/90o01> [7]  
<https://www.uoguelph.ca/hr/summary-guelph-campus-buildings-asbestos-containing-materials> [8] <https://www.uoguelph.ca/hr/about-hr/environmental-health-safety-ehs/ehs-programs-policies-guidelines-and-forms/ehs-programs-4> [9] <mailto:wo@pr.uoguelph.ca> [10] <mailto:ohw@uoguelph.ca> [11] <mailto:housing@uoguelph.ca> [12]  
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