

For Homeowners

Asbestos: Frequently Asked Questions



Testing for asbestos

How do I find a reputable company to do asbestos testing? Does WorkSafeBC have a list?

WorkSafeBC does not maintain a list of contractors; however, lists of potential companies can be obtained from the following sources:

- Yellow pages; the internet; city permits department
- The BC-Yukon local section of the American Industrial Hygiene Association

What questions should I ask the testing company?

- How long have you been in business?
- Do you have a business license issued by the city?
- How many employees do you have? [It might be better to retain a company with more than one asbestos surveyor (qualified persons that collect samples and determine factors such as accessibility and condition of these materials); single surveyors may not have sufficient liability insurance and may not be registered with WorkSafeBC.]
- What kind of training do you have?
- Are you insured (e.g., liability insurance)?
- Are you bonded?
- Have you ever been fined by WorkSafeBC?
- Do you have an exposure control program and a respirator program to protect your workers?
- Do you have any professional certifications (CIH, ROH, CRSP, CSP, etc.)
- Do you have current AHERA certification, or is your AHERA certification expired? [Many asbestos surveyors carry an Asbestos Hazard Emergency Response Act (AHERA) certificate. This certification is required in the US, and many BC surveyors have taken the AHERA course]
- What lab do you use? Is the lab accredited to do asbestos testing?
- Can I see a sample of one of your reports? (The key thing here is the number of samples collected. There should be 18 to 25 samples collected from a typical older home.)

What should I expect from the testing company? A report with data, a letter, recommendations?

You should get an asbestos survey report that identifies any asbestos-containing materials in your house. The



report should include the original lab results and a complete description of the asbestos-containing materials that have to be removed. Here is a list of what should be included in the report:

- Date of the survey
- Company and name of the surveyor
- Address of the house
- Description of the house (basic construction, square footage, how many floors, age, description of any recent renovations, etc.)
- Description of the building materials used in each room of the house (e.g., what is on the floors, walls, and ceilings) and on the exterior (siding, roofing, any window putty, etc.)
- Sampling locations (which room, which wall, floor, ceiling, etc.) and the material collected (e.g., drywall, floor tile, etc.). At least 18 to 25 bulk samples should be collected from a typical house – if not, the report should explain why fewer samples were collected
- Name of the lab and the analytical method used (e.g., NIOSH 9002, EPA 600)
- Laboratory results (original lab results, not just a brief description) should identify whether or not asbestos is present in the materials collected, the type of asbestos and the percentage. Materials listed as “less than 0.5%” or “trace” (etc.), must be considered asbestos-containing unless additional lab methods were used to determine the exact percentage (and that amount should be 0.25% or less).

- A list of the building materials that must be removed as asbestos-containing materials if they are going to be disturbed during the construction. For example, “all walls and ceilings in the living room and kitchen,” or “all of the flooring in the kitchen and bathrooms,” etc.

If the entire house will be demolished, all asbestos-containing materials must be sampled and identified. If particular areas will be renovated, only those need to be surveyed. It is very important to identify all materials that will be disturbed, or else asbestos contamination may be spread throughout your house.

Hiring a contractor

How do I find a reputable contractor to do the asbestos removal? Does WorkSafeBC have a list?

WorkSafeBC does not maintain a list of asbestos abatement contractors; however, lists of potential companies can be obtained from the following sources:

- Yellow pages; internet; city permits department
- The Hazardous Materials Association of BC
- The BC Association of Restoration Contractors may be contacted regarding restoration contractors that also perform asbestos abatement

What questions should I ask the contractor?

- Are you registered with WorkSafeBC?
- How long have you been in business?
- Are you insured (e.g., errors and omissions insurance, liability insurance)?
- Are you bonded?
- Have you ever been fined by WorkSafeBC?
- Do you have a business license issued by the city?

How can I find out if they have appropriate training for the work they’re doing? Is there any sort of certification they should have?

For asbestos surveyors and air sampling companies, the surveyor or technician should have one of the following designations and experience:

- Certified Industrial Hygienist (CIH), Registered Occupational Hygienist (ROH), or Registered Occupational Hygiene Technologist (ROHT), with education and experience specific to asbestos management and work procedures
- Certified Safety Professional (CSP), Canadian Registered Safety Professional (CRSP), or a Professional Engineer, with education and experience specific to asbestos management and work procedures



- An experienced asbestos abatement contractor with education and experience specific to asbestos management and work procedures.
- An AHERA Certified inspector (for asbestos building surveys only)
- NIOSH 582 certificate (for air monitoring technicians) – this is an acceptable asbestos air sampling course given in the US

For asbestos abatement companies:

- Worker training records (these must be kept by the company)
- Supervisor and worker training certificates (many states, including Washington State, and Alberta require asbestos worker certification; workers in BC may have one of these)
- Worker training certificates issued by local safety and environmental consultants

What else do I need to know?

Should the contractor doing removal be different from the one that’s doing the air quality monitoring?

Yes. Third-party sampling for airborne asbestos fibers during an abatement project should be performed by a qualified person, on behalf of the owner or the abatement contractor (and should not be an employee of the contractor). Air monitoring technicians should be employees of an asbestos laboratory or an asbestos consulting agency. It is not an accepted industry practice for asbestos abatement (or other) contractors to perform their own asbestos air monitoring.

Do I need a permit — or anything at all — from the city?

You will need a permit from the city or municipality for demolition or significant renovation work. The requirements vary from city to city, so please consult with city staff in your area.

What is a “clearance letter”? Do I need one after the asbestos is removed?

A “clearance letter” is a document used by industry to tell their clients or other stakeholders (e.g. demolition contractors) that asbestos has been removed and the building is safe to demolish.

Before the city issues a permit, the city may require a clearance letter from the asbestos surveyor or asbestos abatement contractor. The document should include the following information:

- Current date
- Date the asbestos abatement was completed
- Address of the abatement project
- Name of the abatement contractor
- Description of the scope of work that was performed (e.g., what was removed and when)
- Reference to the hazardous materials survey (name of the surveyor or company and when the survey was conducted)
- Notice of Project — Asbestos number
- Waste manifest documentation
- Name of the consultant, surveyor, or contractor who performed the final visual inspection
- A statement indicating that the abatement was conducted in accordance with regulatory requirements (both the Occupational Health and Safety Regulation and the BC Ministry of Environment regulations)
- Name and signature of the surveyor, consultant, or contractor who collected the air clearance samples

You can request a clearance letter from the surveyor or contractor, even if a permit was not required for your renovation.

Will I need to be out of my home during asbestos removal?

It depends on the amount of work required, and the rooms affected (for example, if your kitchen is not accessible, you would not be able to cook). A single bathroom could be sealed off while the asbestos is removed, and there would be no risk of exposure to asbestos provided that the proper controls are in place. You would also have to consider the noise and presence of contractors moving in and out of your house, as part of a decision to stay.

For more information

Resources can assist you in keeping workers safe from asbestos exposure. To access this resource list online, go to:

worksafebc.com/asbestosbeaware

For further information or resources, please visit worksafebc.com or email

ILSConstruction@worksafebc.com

To report an unsafe condition or situation in a workplace, please call our prevention information line at 604.276.3100 in the Lower Mainland, or 1.888.621.7233 toll-free within British Columbia or Alberta.