**Asbestos Hazards in Renovations and Demolitions**

**What is Asbestos?**

Asbestos is a strong, fire-resistant mineral fibre. It was used as insulation against heat or noise, and for fire protection in homes and commercial buildings. When added to materials such as cement and plaster, the asbestos fibres provided more structural strength. Consequently, more than 3,000 products containing asbestos were used in house construction up until the late 1980’s. When renovating or demolishing older homes, there is a high probability of encountering asbestos-containing materials.

The following illustration shows asbestos-containing materials that were once commonly used in residential construction.
Demolishing or renovating houses containing asbestos products can release asbestos fibres, which are extremely fine and can stay in the air for hours. Unprotected workers exposed to asbestos-contaminated air can breathe in the fibres. This may cause serious health problems, such as lung disease and cancer. Most workers who have died from overexposure to asbestos fibres have been in the construction trades.

**Reduce Your Risk**

Be aware that it is the joint responsibility of the insurance company, property manager, building owner, and/or the contractor to comply with the Occupational Health and Safety Act General Regulations whenever a renovation, restoration or demolition project is undertaken. Contractors are legally required to ensure that all hazardous materials, such as asbestos, are identified and abated in a safe manner. Failure to do so could expose workers, occupants, and the general public to hazardous materials with significant potential liability issues for all involved.

Contract firms that meet the legislated and legal requirements to protect the health and safety of workers employed on the project site.

Ensure that the contractor has a qualified person inspect the site to identify any onsite hazards such as lead and asbestos, or other hazardous materials that may be present. If the contractor is unable to provide documentation for a hazardous material assessment, it may result in a Stop Work Order at the project site by an Occupational Health and Safety Officer.

Contract a certified asbestos abatement contractor if asbestos containing materials are present. Certified asbestos abatement contractors in PEI are listed on the Workers Compensation Board’s website at [www.wcb.pe.ca](http://www.wcb.pe.ca) under Service Providers.

Ensure that a signed copy of the Asbestos Notification Permit is posted at the worksite by the certified asbestos abatement contractor.

Dispose waste materials containing asbestos at an approved waste management facility. Asbestos disposal permits are required and may be obtained from the PEI Department of Communities, Land and Environment.

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*If you have questions on this or any workplace safety topic, contact WCB Occupational Health & Safety at 902-368-5697 or toll free 1-800-237-5049, or visit our website at wcb.pe.ca.*