

Protecting Workers from the Hazards of Asbestos-Containing Flooring Material Maintenance

Many resilient flooring tiles contain asbestos, a mineral fiber used in numerous building materials before its dangerous health effects were discovered. A hazard exists for workers who buff or wax flooring material containing asbestos. Any floor tiles installed prior to 1980 should be presumed to contain asbestos — unless confirmed to be asbestos-free by a laboratory — and the proper protective actions should be taken. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has regulations to protect workers from asbestos.

What is the hazard?

The equipment used during the care or maintenance of asbestos-containing flooring tiles has an abrasive pad which runs at high speeds, and can release tiny asbestos fibers into the air.

The airborne fibers can then be inhaled by workers without knowing it, and become trapped in their lungs.

Asbestos is a known human carcinogen and can cause chronic lung disease as well as lung and other cancers.

How do I know if there is a hazard?

Airborne asbestos fibers are very small and cannot be seen by the naked eye.

Flooring materials installed prior to 1980 should be presumed to contain asbestos and should be treated as such, unless a piece of the material is sent to a reputable laboratory and analyzed for asbestos by transmission electron microscopy and found to contain a concentration of less than 1.0%.

What should be done to protect workers?

Workers caring for asbestos-containing flooring material (general industry) are protected by OSHA's Asbestos standard, 29 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part 1910.1001. OSHA has separate asbestos standards for the construction and shipyard industries due to differing working conditions and asbestos exposures.

Training elements of OSHA's Asbestos Standard

Initial and annual training must be provided in a manner and language that workers can understand. The training must include: health effects of asbestos; locations of asbestos-containing and presumed asbestos-containing materials; recognition of damage and deterioration of asbestos-containing materials; and the proper response to fiber release episodes. The following elements should be included in this training:

Care of Asbestos-Containing Flooring Materials

- Do not sand asbestos-containing flooring material;
- Use only low-abrasion buffing pads;
- Operate buffers only at speeds lower than 300 rpm;
- Use wet methods;
- If asbestos-containing flooring material has sufficient finish, brushing or dry buffing is permissible.

If these methods are properly implemented, personal protective equipment (PPE) should not be necessary.

Recordkeeping

A record of training and worker notification is necessary. If applicable, any exposure monitoring records and medical monitoring records must also be kept.

Workers' Rights

Workers have the right to:

- Working conditions that do not pose a risk of serious harm.
- Receive information and training (in a language and vocabulary the worker understands) about workplace hazards, methods to prevent them, and the OSHA standards that apply to their workplace.
- Review records of work-related injuries and illnesses.
- File a complaint asking OSHA to inspect their workplace if they believe there is a serious hazard or that their employer is not following OSHA's rules. OSHA will keep all identities confidential.
- Exercise their rights under the law without retaliation, including reporting an injury or raising health and safety concerns with their employer or OSHA. If a worker has been retaliated against for using their rights, they must file a complaint with OSHA as soon as possible, but no later than 30 days.

For additional information see OSHA's Workers page (www.osha.gov/workers).

How to Contact OSHA

Under the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970, employers are responsible for providing safe and healthful workplaces for their employees. OSHA's role is to ensure these conditions for America's workers by setting and enforcing standards, and providing training, education and assistance. For more information, visit www.osha.gov or call OSHA at 1-800-321-OSHA (6742), TTY 1-877-889-5627.

This is one in a series of informational fact sheets highlighting OSHA programs, policies or standards. It does not impose any new compliance requirements. For a comprehensive list of compliance requirements of OSHA standards or regulations, refer to Title 29 of the Code of Federal Regulations. This information will be made available to sensory-impaired individuals upon request. The voice phone is (202) 693-1999; teletypewriter (TTY) number: (877) 889-5627.

