



ASBESTOS & STRUCTURE FIRES

June 2012

Background

This fact sheet was produced to answer health-related questions that citizens may have about potential asbestos contamination due to structure fires.

Many Connecticut cities and towns have abandoned structures such as old factories and textile mills. Recently, several of these structures have been destroyed by fires. These structures often have roofing materials containing asbestos. Sometimes these materials can be carried by wind to surrounding areas including residential neighborhoods.



What Agencies Respond To Possible Asbestos Contamination From These Fires?

The Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (CT DEEP) is responsible for investigating environmental contamination issues, including collecting samples, relating to these fires. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency may also be involved in the investigation and clean-up. The Connecticut Department of Public Health (CT DPH) analyzes samples to determine if there is asbestos in these materials. The CT DPH also works with the local health department to answer health concerns.

Are There Health Concerns Due To Asbestos Spread by Fires?

Asbestos fibers can be found nearly everywhere in our environment –usually at very low levels. In most fire situations it is not expected that any members of the public have had or will have asbestos exposures that will result in adverse health effects – health problems. Adverse health effects from exposure to asbestos have been seen in people who were exposed to asbestos on a regular basis (like at work) for a long period of time (years). The risk of developing health problems from asbestos exposure are increased for those who smoke. It is unlikely that anyone in the area of a fire will have more than a short term, low level exposure to asbestos from this fire.

What Is the Advice For Nearby Residents?

CT DEEP and/or EPA investigates how much asbestos has been carried from the site and how much clean-up must be done. Major clean-up is usually done by a private contractor. However, there may be small amounts of fire debris left in some areas after the clean-up. Residents may safely clean up this debris using the following precautions:

- ⇒ Do not disturb debris (raking, mowing) before clean-up.
- ⇒ If you pick up debris, use gloves.
- ⇒ Wet debris with a fine mist before handling.
- ⇒ Place debris in a plastic bag, seal the bag and dispose in regular trash.
- ⇒ Do not bring any debris inside.

Background on Asbestos

Asbestos is a mineral made up of long, thin fibers that occur naturally in the environment.

Asbestos fibers are very strong and resistant to heat and chemicals. Because of these properties, asbestos has been used in many products including roofing materials, insulation and brake pads. Asbestos is very stable in the environment – it does not evaporate into air, dissolve in water, or break down over time. Everyone can be exposed to asbestos from both natural sources and the break-down of manufactured products. Low levels of asbestos can be found in almost any air sample. The most serious exposures have occurred in certain workplaces such as mines and shipyards. Government agencies have determined that asbestos is a known carcinogen (causes cancer). Breathing asbestos fibers can increase the risk of lung cancer and mesothelioma (cancer of the lining around the lungs and other organs). Ingestion (drinking or eating) of asbestos fibers are not believed to be a health risk.

Who Can I Call For More Information?

For Health Questions:

CT Department of Public Health ...**860 509-7740**

Your Health Department _____

For Questions About Clean-up:

CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection..... **860-424-3377**

