

Safety Note #141

## ASBESTOS AWARENESS



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Desert REC

Asbestos is a family of naturally occurring minerals that occur throughout the world, including California. Asbestos fibers are small, thin, strong, and resistant to heat and chemicals. These characteristics make asbestos ideal for use in many building materials, including thermal system insulation, floor tiles, roofing materials, and surfacing compounds. From the 1950s to 1970s asbestos was frequently used in the construction of many commercial and lab buildings throughout California and the USA.

California regulations define "asbestos-containing construction materials" (ACM) as any manufactured construction material, including structural, mechanical and building material that contains more than one percent of asbestos by weight. These materials are further classified as either "friable" (crumbly) or "non-friable" (non-crumbly).

The presence of undisturbed and non-friable ACM in a building does not present a health hazard. However, exposures to airborne asbestos fibers for prolonged periods, above 0.1 fibers per cubic centimeter of air; have been known to cause lung cancer and other asbestos-related diseases. Asbestos is listed under Proposition 65 of the California Health and Safety Code as a chemical known to cause cancer. In addition, California Code of Regulations Title 8, Section 5208 requires employers to communicate information and hazards of asbestos to its employees and train all employees that perform housekeeping in and around ACM. On an annual basis, employees shall be informed in writing of ACM in or near work areas. All Research & Extension Centers (RECs) are informed yearly of where ACM is at their location. For UCCE facilities, contact the local building management about ACM in the buildings.

To reduce risk of exposure to friable or non-friable asbestos, these safety tips should be followed:

- Avoid touching or disturbing suspect ACM on walls, ceilings, pipes, or floors.
- Do not saw, punch, or drill holes in to ACM.
- Do not pin or hang pictures on walls covered with ACM.
- Do not sand asbestos floor tiles or backing material.
- Do not access areas above ceilings that contain ACM.
- Do not damage ACM while moving furniture or other items.
- Do not brush or sweep ceilings covered with asbestos materials.

If you believe a project that may involve or come near ACM, consult the asbestos inventory at your location. Some examples of projects that can involve working in or around ACM are:

- Removal of carpet that is layered over ACM tile.
- Removal or replacing of ACM pipe insulation.
- Replacing of a greenhouse lower walls (the wall and the joint material both can contain asbestos).
- A contractor replacing ACM ceiling tiles.

Remember to notify contractors that they may be working with or near ACM. Not doing this can put the UC and the contractor at risk. If a project does involve or come near ACM or if you are not sure, contact **ANR EH&S**. A state certified asbestos contractor is required to do all work that involves ACM. A permit may also be required for the project depending on the type of asbestos and the size of the area. ACM also cannot be discarded like most construction refuse.

Additional information on disposal of ACM can be found in the Storage and Removal of Regulated Waste Policy and Procedures. This document plus training videos and other material are also available at the [ANR EH&S web site](http://safety.ucanr.edu/).

