

Renovations and Asbestos

WHEN IS IT A BIG DEAL?

Worksafe BC tells us that Asbestos continues to be the number one cause of occupational disease death for workers in beautiful British Columbia. Dying of asbestos is anything but beautiful. Think of drowning slowly over months, even years before your body finally gives up the will to breathe. Not to mention the cancers, both lung cancer and mesothelioma.

Their efforts to educate the workers of this province have had much resistance over the years as the people paying the bills (building and home owners) continue to find cheap labour willing to risk their lives (and the lives of their workers) to make a quick buck usually because they just don't get it. Although there are a variety of reasons for this, the biggest one is that many just don't believe the facts because the consequences are not quickly apparent. It can take decades before that exposure kills the worker.

As a restoration contractor, we are called out to damage incidents and need to determine quickly if the materials that are impacted by the damage event and must be manipulated or removed are containing asbestos. If we suspect so, we send a sample to the lab for analysis. The turnaround time is usually one day, however it can be the same day if required.

The big deal (referred to in the title) is when the renovation or restoration activity has the potential to cause a release of asbestos fibres into the air

where the occupants and/or workers suck them deep into their lungs. Sanding, grinding and demolition/removal activities are the highest risk activities.

It is NOT a big deal if the material doesn't need to be disturbed. Every home built prior to approximately 1990 has asbestos in various building materials. It is not the obligation of the insurance company to remove all the asbestos from your home and replace it with new materials that do not contain asbestos when you have an insurance claim. Nor is it the obligation of the owner selling his property to remove all asbestos containing materials from their building just because the home inspector identifies that it exists.

This last point is the big one that motivates this article. There seems to be a move about, striking fear into the heart of buyers and sellers alike that the asbestos containing materials in homes they are wanting to buy/sell is dangerous and must be removed or its presence will most certainly devalue the property. Virtually all older homes contain ACM (asbestos containing materials). It is what it is.

In summary, if you are renovating an older home, be safe. Test the materials that potentially contain and abate as per regulations as necessary. If you're not then **VIVA LIBRE!**

Graham Dick of Genesis Restorations in Surrey is recognized for his expertise in restoring property damaged by fire, flood, sewer and mould. As a Certified Restorer™, he was a founding director of the first safety association in Canada for the restoration industry. Genesis is also HPO licensed in Building Envelope Renovations and covered by National Home Warranty.

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