

Advisory

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For immediate release

Health Canada is advising Canadians about the potential risks to health posed by vermiculite insulation that may contain asbestos

OTTAWA - Health Canada is advising Canadians about potential health risks posed by some vermiculite insulation that may contain asbestos. This product can present health risks if disturbed during maintenance, renovation or demolition. However, there is currently no evidence of a risk to health if the insulation remains sealed behind wallboards and floorboards, isolated in an attic, or otherwise kept from exposure to the interior environment.

The best way to minimize your risk of asbestos exposure is to avoid disturbing vermiculite-based insulation in any way. If vermiculite-based insulation is contained and not exposed to the home or interior environment, it poses very little risk to health. If you have concerns about your health due to possible exposure to asbestos, you should talk to your doctor or primary health care provider.

Vermiculite ore produced from the Libby Mine in Montana, USA, from the 1920s to 1990, may contain asbestos. This mine supplied the majority of the world market in vermiculite insulation, mostly sold under the brand name Zonolite. Insulation material made from vermiculite ore produced by the Libby Mine was not widely used after the mid-1980's and has not been sold on the market in Canada for more than 10 years. Not all vermiculite insulation produced before 1990 contains asbestos. However, it is prudent, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, to assume that vermiculite insulation material produced before 1990 may contain some asbestos.

Asbestos poses health risks only when fibres are present in the air that people breathe. When inhaled, asbestos fibres can cause asbestosis (a scarring of the lungs which makes breathing difficult), mesothelioma (a rare cancer of the lining of the chest or abdominal cavity) and lung cancer. Asbestos related illnesses are usually associated with frequent and prolonged exposure to asbestos rather than occasional exposure. The time it takes to develop a disease from exposure to asbestos is usually very long - up to decades.

Based on current information, there is no evidence that vermiculite currently available for horticultural purposes (eg. potting plants) is a health risk when used as directed.

For more information on vermiculite insulation, please visit [Health Canada's website](http://www.healthcanada.gc.ca) or call 1-800-443-0395.