



Why is the survey being performed?

This survey will ensure regulatory compliance with the new regulations relating to asbestos inventories, while providing an updated, comprehensive and readily accessible survey of all building which may contain asbestos-containing material. The University wants to ensure that it has a comprehensive and accessible survey that can be made available to all persons (both Queen's employees and contractors) who have a need to be aware of the presence of asbestos prior to maintenance, renovation or demolition. This survey will be commenced shortly and it will be completed by the end of the year.

Will there be any risk to occupants during the asbestos survey?

No. The surveyors will be required to enter every room and the ceiling space of most rooms to prepare the comprehensive survey. All surveyors have extensive classroom and field training and perform their work with the absolute minimum of asbestos disturbance. Guidelines for performing such surveys will be followed and these have been shown to not cause any measurable exposure to the surveyor or the building occupants). In order to minimize occupant or classroom interruption surveys may be scheduled outside normal class or working hours but this is done merely for the convenience of University staff – not due to any health risk.

Is the presence of asbestos in buildings a risk to occupants?

In the early 1980's the question had no answer and for this reason the Ontario Government established the "Royal Commission on Matters of Health and Safety Arising from the Use of Asbestos in Ontario". The Commission Report is still available in libraries (ISBN 0-7743-8508-1). After 3 years of study, testing and research, the Commission concluded that the risk posed to building occupants by the presence of even the most friable form of asbestos (namely sprayed fireproofing) was not significant. They concluded any risk was "orders of magnitude below the risks faced by the general population" (page 585) in normal day-to-day activities.

In addition, "the Commission found no evidence that disease inflicts individuals who breathe asbestos in the outdoor air or inhale it as occupants of asbestos-containing buildings" (page 8). Although the Commission's report was published over 20 years ago these conclusions have been confirmed by other more recent studies and remain valid today.

When is asbestos a hazard in buildings?

The Commission concluded that when asbestos (particularly friable asbestos) was disturbed by cutting, grinding, abrasion or other direct physical contact that it could become airborne and inhaled sufficiently to cause health effects. The final report stated "On the other hand, construction, demolition, renovation, maintenance, and custodial workers in asbestos-containing buildings may be exposed to significant asbestos fibre levels and may, during their work, cause elevated fibre levels for nearby occupants"(page 548).

Is asbestos in buildings regulated today in Ontario?

The Ontario Ministry of Labour acted on the Commission's report and published the "Regulation respecting Asbestos on Construction Projects and in Buildings and Repair Operations" in 1985. This was the first asbestos in buildings regulation in the world. The regulation follows a management-in-place philosophy but requires removal in specific situations such as when it is being disturbed by major renovation or demolition or deteriorating and being disturbed by occupant activity. A Management Program to prevent inadvertent disturbance and exposure is required and the University has such a policy in place.

If I want more information or have any questions, where do I go?

Any health and safety issues related to asbestos can be addressed to Dan Langham, Director, Environmental Health and Safety at 613-533-6000 x74980 or at langhamd@post.queensu.ca