



## Office of Pollution Prevention and Toxics

### Asbestos in Vermiculite Insulation

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) offices have received a large number of phone calls from citizens concerned about insulation that might contain asbestos in their homes. EPA is gathering more information about vermiculite insulation and other products containing vermiculite that may be contaminated with asbestos. If you suspect vermiculite insulation is in your home, the safest thing is to leave the material alone. If you decide to remove or must otherwise disturb the material due to a renovation project, consult with an experienced asbestos contractor. The following information provides a common-sense approach to help you find out what kind of insulation is in your home and decide what to do if you have vermiculite insulation.

Choose a Topic:

Go to: [Background](#)

Go to: [Why is it a problem?](#)

Go to: [What does it look like?](#)

Go to: [What should I do if I have vermiculite insulation?](#)

Go to: [How do I find an accredited asbestos removal professional?](#)

Go to: [Where can I get more information?](#)

### Background

Product names cannot be used to determine if your insulation might contain asbestos. All vermiculite is likely to contain small or trace amounts of asbestos. EPA believes that a number of manufacturers produced insulation from vermiculite. One mine in the United States produced over 70 percent of the world's vermiculite before the mine was closed in 1990. Vermiculite products generated from this mine were likely to have been contaminated with asbestos.

[Back to Top](#)

### Why is it a problem?

If disturbed, asbestos fibers in vermiculite insulation may get into the air. These fibers can be inhaled and become trapped in the lungs where they may cause diseases such as asbestosis, lung cancer, and mesothelioma. These diseases can develop many years after exposure to asbestos.

[Back to Top](#)

### What does it look like?

Vermiculite is a mineral that is shaped like a small nugget, and varies in color from silver-gold to gray-brown. The asbestos fibers contained in vermiculite insulation are generally too small to be seen without magnification. Only a trained technician using careful microscopic examination can see asbestos fibers.



Click on the image to see an enlarged picture of vermiculite.

[Back to Top](#)

### What should I do if I have vermiculite insulation in my home ?

Look at the insulation without disturbing it. If it appears you have vermiculite insulation in your home, we recommend the following steps:

- If possible, leave the insulation undisturbed. Asbestos particles will not become airborne if the insulation is contained. If it's sealed behind wallboards and floorboards or is isolated in an attic that is vented outside, the best approach is to keep it in place.
- If you are planning to remodel or replace vermiculite insulation, have it tested first.
  - EPA recommends using a trained and accredited professional to conduct the tests. If you decide to remove the vermiculite home insulation, use accredited, licensed asbestos removal professionals. Use of a "negative pressure enclosure" technique will prevent asbestos fibers and dust from escaping from the attic into the rest of the home. **Do not attempt to do this yourself.** You could spread asbestos fibers throughout your home, putting you and your family at risk of inhaling asbestos fibers.
  - After the vermiculite insulation is removed, you may want to consider having air monitoring tests done in your attic and throughout the living areas of your home. This is to ensure that the concentration of asbestos fibers in the home is low or not present.

[Back to Top](#)

### How do I find an accredited asbestos removal professional?

An accredited asbestos inspector has undergone approved training and then taken examinations to be accredited. He or she will be able take samples of the insulation, provide information on the results, and advise about additional tests or options to consider. Inspectors can be found in the Yellow Pages under "Asbestos Consulting and Testing" or "Asbestos Abatement." Ask the inspector to provide the name of the company that trained, accredited him or her. Call that company to confirm whether a particular inspector has had the required training and has up-to-date accreditation. If your State has licensing, confirm that the inspector's license is also current. Companies that can test the air in your home will be found under the same listings.

[Back to Top](#)

### Where can I get more information?

Information can be found on the hotline and web sites below as it becomes available.

For current information on asbestos and health related information, contact EPA's TSCA Hotline at 1-202-554-1404 or visit EPA headquarters' Asbestos web site: [www.epa.gov/asbestos](http://www.epa.gov/asbestos)



- If you choose to follow the link below, you will be leaving EPA web pages. The Exit Disclaimer graphic on the left will take you to EPA's Exit Disclaimer page.

Also visit the federal Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) website at [www.atsdr.cdc.gov](http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov).

[Back to Top](#)

| [Asbestos Home](#) | [OPPTS Home](#) | [OPPT Home](#) | [EPA Home](#) | [Search](#) | [Comments](#)

#### Asbestos Programs

URL: <http://www.epa.gov/opptintr/asbestos/insulation.htm>

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