

Frequently Asked Questions Regarding Asbestos Removal

Q. Is it safe to be doing asbestos abatement in an occupied building?

A. Yes. Asbestos abatement contractors must follow strict regulations when performing asbestos abatement to ensure that asbestos is not dispersed outside the work area. The abatement area is segregated from occupied/non-abatement areas using plastic sheeting and in some cases, plywood. Only the abatement contractors are allowed to enter the abatement area once the project begins.

During the removal process, the contractors take several precautions to minimize dispersal of asbestos fibers, which includes wetting the materials. A "negative air" machine draws air from the abatement area through a series of filters, including a High Efficiency Particulate Air (HEPA) filter, to remove asbestos fibers and dusts that may contain asbestos. This ensures that the abatement area is "negative" with respect to the uninvolved area, such that air does not flow out of the abatement area into occupied areas, except through filters. The filtered air is exhausted to the exterior of the building.

A third-party firm conducts testing outside of the abatement area to confirm that there are no elevated fiber levels outside the work area.

Given these precautions, people outside of the abatement area are not at risk for exposure to asbestos from these abatement projects.

Q. It looks like there is an air hose coming out of the abatement area. Is there asbestos coming out of it?

A. In most asbestos abatement containment areas, a "negative air" machine draws potentially contaminated air across a series of filters, with a High Efficiency Particulate Air (HEPA) filter, to remove any asbestos fibers and dusts that might contain asbestos. The exhaust from this machine may be placed outside of the abatement area. The air coming from it has been filtered through filters that are proven to trap asbestos fibers. Thus, it does not pose an asbestos exposure risk.

Q. During the abatement, can asbestos travel to other areas through the ventilation system?

A. During the preparation of the abatement area, any vents connected to the building's ventilation system are sealed. In most cases, the ventilation system is turned off to the work area during the abatement. Thus, protective measures are taken to prevent asbestos from traveling to areas outside of the containment area.

Q. How do we know that asbestos is not coming out of the abatement area?

A. Asbestos abatement regulations require the University to hire a third party firm to conduct air testing for asbestos outside of the abatement area. Testing is conducted on-site. Test reports are available to the abatement firm and the NYU Environmental Health & Safety project manager.

Q. How do we know that the area is safe after an asbestos abatement?

Asbestos abatement regulations require the University to hire a third-party firm to conduct clearance testing after the area has been cleaned up and before the area may be reoccupied. Testing is conducted on-site and test reports are available to the abatement firm and the NYU Environmental Health & Safety's project manager. A work area will not be released to the building until successful final air clearance in the work area has been achieved.

Q. Are the people removing the asbestos University employees?

A. No. New York University faculty, staff and students are prohibited from intentionally disturbing asbestos-containing material and from removing such materials. The University hires certified, licensed asbestos abatement contractors with a proven positive work record at NYU.

Q. How do we know that the asbestos abatement contractors are doing their job correctly?

A. Regulatory inspectors conduct unannounced inspections of many abatement projects that take place on campus. The University Environmental Health & Safety's project manager follows up on all abatement jobs and will not rehire a firm that does not conduct their work in accordance with the University's high standards. In addition, a third party environmental consultant is retained by the University to ensure that the contractor is performing work per applicable regulations.

Q. What happens to the asbestos that is removed?

A. While still in the abatement area, the contractors place the wet asbestos debris in specially marked bags. Before bringing them out of the abatement area, the sealed bags of debris are washed and then placed in secondary bags that are also marked "Asbestos-Containing Materials". The sealed bags are placed in locked dumpsters before being transported to a secure landfill that accepts asbestos waste.

Q. How do the asbestos abatement contractors avoid bringing asbestos out of the abatement area on their clothing?

A. Asbestos contractors wear disposable suits, hoods, gloves, shoe covers and respirators. Between the abatement area and the non-abatement area, there is a clean-up/decontamination area where the contractors remove their protective clothing before entering the clean zone. At no time does a worker exit the abatement area without properly decontaminating himself/herself.

In all cases, the regulations require air monitoring outside the abatement area, which confirms that there is no contamination outside the abatement area.