

Northeastern Asbestos FAQ

Guidance document for Faculty, Staff, Students, and Visitors of Northeastern University regarding Asbestos Containing Material (ACM) and Potentially Asbestos Containing Material (PACM)

What is Asbestos?

"Asbestos is a fibrous natural mineral once used in a variety of building materials. It is known to cause lung cancer and respiratory diseases. MassDEP regulates abatement, construction and demolition projects that involve asbestos." [Mass.gov/massdep-asbestos-construction-demolition-notifications]

Good Advice

If asbestos-containing material is in good condition, the best thing you can do is leave it alone.

Are there buildings at Northeastern that contain Asbestos?

Buildings at Northeastern University Boston Campus were built as early as 1898. Due to the ages of these buildings, asbestos-containing materials (ACMs) may have been or are present in Northeastern University buildings. The Environmental Compliance & Occupational Safety (ECOS) department within Planning, Real Estate, & Facilities (PREF) maintains an up-to-date ACM inventory for the Boston campus. Any locations that have not been tested are assumed to be PACM until proven otherwise. The only way to be sure whether a material contains asbestos is to have it tested by a qualified laboratory. *Campuses outside of Boston can contact a member of ECOS or your local operations team for questions regarding ACM or PACM on campus.*

How does Northeastern manage ACM or PACM?

If asbestos is in good condition and it does not pose a health hazard, no laws or regulations require that it be removed. The best thing to do is to leave it alone. Northeastern PREF employees strive to maintain buildings to ensure that Potentially Asbestos Containing Material (PACM) remains intact and to prevent potential releases of ACM. If a demolition, renovation, repair, or other construction activity may disturb PACM, Northeastern will follow local, state, and federal regulations to ensure proper testing and abatement or encapsulation activities occur and there are no hazards present. If building materials are in poor condition and PACM is observed, building occupants should notify a member of PREF to have the area properly inspected.

How does Northeastern ensure the safety of personnel from ACM?

Asbestos that is in good condition does not present a health risk. The risks from asbestos occur when the asbestos materials become damaged and asbestos fibers become airborne and can be inhaled. Managing asbestos in place and maintaining it in good condition is often the best approach. All building materials scheduled for disturbance by renovation projects are sampled for asbestos content by a MA DLS licensed Asbestos Inspector prior to the disturbance of the materials by the renovation procedures. Any identified asbestos materials are properly abated by a MA DLS Asbestos Contractor prior to their disturbance by the renovation procedures. The Asbestos Inspector will inspect all applicable materials for asbestos and recommend the best approach for abatement.

How does Northeastern ensure that there are no asbestos particles in the air?

Air testing is required following all asbestos abatement projects to determine whether the activity has been properly completed. Asbestos air sampling by a MA DLS licensed Asbestos Project Monitor is conducted during all phases of abatement and post abatement air sampling is conducted to verify that the area was properly abated prior to the re-occupancy of the space. If there are specific concerns regarding the air quality of a space, or building materials that are in poor condition, a work order should be submitted so the space can be properly inspected.