



## **Vermiculite Insulation and Asbestos Questions and Answers**

### **What is Vermiculite?**

Vermiculite is a mica-like mineral mined around the world and used in a variety of commercial and consumer products because it is fire-resistant and has good insulation qualities.

### **Does it contain asbestos?**

Some vermiculite produced at Libby Mine in Montana from the 1920s until 1990 and sold under the brand name Zonolite may contain asbestos. The products have not been on the market since the 1990s however if your building is old, it may have older vermiculite-based insulation.

### **What happens if it has been found in my attic?**

The Cape Breton Island Housing Authority is currently working with the Nova Scotia Department of Environment and Labour on an action plan to deal with the asbestos. They will be keeping in touch with affected residents.

### **Is this harmful to me and my family?**

If left undisturbed, it poses a very low risk. For asbestos to present a problem to people, it must be disturbed so that tiny fibres are released into the air. This might happen if, for example, you are moving boxes around in the attic near insulation.

### **What are the health concerns with asbestos?**

According to Health Canada, the overall percentages of asbestos in vermiculite are very low. If disturbed, fibres may circulate in the air and the effect on you or someone in your family would depend on how long the exposure lasted, how often you were exposed

### **What can happen over the long-term?**

Related illnesses are usually associated with frequent and prolonged exposure to large amounts of asbestos. From the first exposure it can take 20 to 30 years to develop a disease.

When inhaled in significant amounts the fibres can cause a scarring of the lungs which makes it difficult to breathe, or cause mesothelioma (a rare cancer of the body) or lung cancer.

### **What should I do if I think asbestos is making me sick?**

You should talk to your physician. Avoid further exposure to any form of asbestos. If you smoke, you should stop. Exposure to cigarette smoke and asbestos increases your chances of developing lung cancer.

### **Can people be tested for asbestos exposure?**

No, there is no test for screening people with no symptoms.