



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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Avoid asbestos, insulation and lead dust exposure during storm cleanup

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Cleaning up storm-damaged buildings can create serious health and environmental hazards, the Alabama Department of Public Health cautions. Buildings that have been damaged can produce a range of materials that may be hazardous including asbestos, home or industrial cleaning products, insulation, old lead paint and other materials that may contain lead.

Elevated concentrations of airborne asbestos can occur if asbestos-containing materials in many older homes are disturbed. Pipe or other insulation, ceiling tiles, exterior siding, roof shingles and sprayed-on soundproofing are just some of the materials found in older buildings that may contain asbestos.

Buildings constructed before 1980 are more likely to contain asbestos. Airborne asbestos can cause lung cancer and mesothelioma, a cancer of the chest and abdominal linings.

Lead is a highly toxic metal which produces a range of adverse health effects, particularly in young children. Many homes built before 1978 may contain lead-based paint. Disturbance or removal of materials containing lead-based paint may result in elevated concentrations of lead dust in the air.

If damaged public and commercial buildings are intact and safe to enter, all regulatory requirements are in force if the buildings are to be demolished or renovated.

However, there are no regulatory requirements for damaged public or commercial buildings if they are significantly damaged, are unsafe to enter, and are to be destroyed. During demolition of these heavily damaged buildings, debris must be kept wet.

Complete demolition is unrestricted, but partially damaged structures that are rebuilt must be cleared for lead problems before they are occupied again.

The following safety procedures are recommended for homeowners and volunteer workers. Note that professional removal companies are required to follow all applicable federal and state regulations.

General cleanup advice

- Before entering any building, assess whether there is any structural damage that poses the risk of collapse or falling objects.

- Take care when entering buildings. There may be physical and chemical hazards or damage to electrical or gas services. Inspect the area thoroughly before attempting to recover items from any damaged structures.
- DO NOT bury any solid waste, including asbestos waste or other building waste on your property, or in nearby gullies, as it may contaminate the land and cause harm later.

Wear appropriate clothing

- Wear loose-fitting, long-sleeved and long-legged clothing to prevent exposure to potentially hazardous chemicals.
- Wear sturdy footwear to protect against hazards such as broken glass.
- Be careful if you are using unfamiliar machinery.
- Wear a head cover, especially when working with material overhead.
- Wear gloves to prevent skin exposure and irritation.
- Do not tape sleeves or pants at wrists or ankles.
- Remove dust and fiber particles from work clothes before leaving work.

Wear appropriate personal protective equipment

- It is recommended to use a high quality dust mask/respirator.
- Do not take off your mask until removing outer clothing and washing hands.
- Use eye protection to prevent eye exposure.

After cleanup is finished

- In handling materials believed to be contaminated with asbestos or lead, wash hands and remove clothing while still wearing the mask.
- Wash hands or take a shower.
- Wash clothes used during cleanup separately from other clothing.

Removing asbestos materials

- Asbestos may be in exterior building tiles, floor tiles, roofing material or insulation. If broken, damaged or cut, asbestos can be reduced to fine fibers that can become airborne during cleanup. Use caution when cleaning up these materials.
- If you think your damaged house or other buildings may contain asbestos, allow only those wearing appropriate protective equipment to enter. Try to keep the area damp to prevent fibers or dust being released into the air.
- Use a P-100 respirator if possible, but use an N-95 mask, if that is all that is available.
- Asbestos waste should be wetted down before collection, then wrapped securely in heavy duty plastic sheeting or plastic bags before taking to an approved landfill.
- If vacuuming, use a HEPA-filter equipped vacuum wherever possible.

Removing lead-containing materials

- Pre-1978 homes may contain lead-based paints.
- Disturbance or removal of materials containing lead-based paint may result in elevated levels of lead dust in the air which could then be breathed into the body.
- Minimize dust and take precautions when handling materials that may contain lead.
- Wash hands thoroughly after cleanup and especially before eating.
- If vacuuming, use a HEPA-filter equipped vacuum where possible.
- Use a P-100 respirator if possible, but use an N-95 mask, if that is all that is available.

Removing insulation fibers

- Typically, insulation is non-toxic but it can be a physical irritant to exposed skin.

- If fibers accumulate on the skin, do not rub or scratch. Never remove fibers from the skin by blowing with compressed air.
- If fibers are seen penetrating the skin, they may be removed by applying and then removing adhesive tape so that the fibers adhere to the tape and are pulled out of the skin.
- Dust and fiber particles may be deposited in the eyes. If this should happen, do not rub the eyes. Flush them with water or eyewash solution. Consult a physician if irritation persists.
- It is recommended that an N-95 mask be used.

Disposing of debris and waste materials

- Remove and dispose of all debris and waste materials properly.
- Guidelines for burning materials will be issued by the Alabama Department of Environmental Management.

Please contact the ADPH Toxicology Branch at (334) 206-5973 for more information.