

## Common Attic Insulation May Contain Asbestos

State and federal officials are cautioning homeowners to avoid disturbing vermiculite attic insulation due to new concerns that the materials may be contaminated with low levels of asbestos, said Marion Burnside, the state asbestos inspector with the Department of Natural Resources.

He said the recent federal advice comes from a joint U.S. EPA and Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry campaign to raise awareness and educate homeowners on how to avoid exposure.

"A cause for concern, but not for panic, people should take simple, common sense precautions to avoid inhaling asbestos fibers," said Marion Burnside, a DNR asbestos inspector. "That includes not disturbing vermiculite attic insulation." He noted that common dust masks do not provide protection against asbestos fibers.

Much of the vermiculite used to make attic insulation originated from a mine in Libby, Montana, where natural veins of asbestos in the earth contaminated the vermiculite supply. That mine closed in 1990. Currently, vermiculite is mined at three U.S. facilities and in other countries which have lower levels of asbestos contamination in the finished material.

Due to scientific uncertainties associated with existing testing techniques, there is no easy or dependable testing method to differentiate between vermiculite insulation that might have some asbestos fibers and vermiculite insulation that does not. Because home testing of vermiculite is not practical, it is best to assume that the material may contain asbestos and take appropriate precautions, according to EPA.

Federal and state officials advise homeowners to take these practical steps to minimize exposure.

- Homeowners should not disturb vermiculite attic insulation. Any disturbance has the potential to release asbestos fibers into the air.
- If homeowners must go into attic space with vermiculite insulation, they should make every effort to limit the number, duration, and activity level of those trips. Boxes or other items should not be stored in attics if retrieving them will disturb the insulation.
- Children should not be allowed to play in an attic with open areas of vermiculite insulation.
- Homeowners should never attempt to remove vermiculite insulation. If removal is necessary, hire professionals trained and certified to safely remove the material.
- If you plan to remodel or conduct renovations that would disturb the vermiculite, hire professionals trained and certified to handle asbestos to safely remove the material.

To view a brochure on how to identify and manage vermiculite insulation visit, EPA's website: [www.epa.gov/asbestos](http://www.epa.gov/asbestos). Consumers may also order the brochure or speak to specialists by calling an EPA hotline at 1-800-471-7127.

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