The Safe Approach:
Asbestos Awareness for the Mechanical Trades

Overview

- Harmful asbestos fibers are microscopic, so you can't see them if they're airborne
- Asbestos-related illnesses don't show up until 15 to 40 years after exposure; by that time, it's probably too late to do anything about them

What Is Asbestos?

- A naturally occurring mineral made up of microscopic fibers that are long, thin, hollow and nearly indestructible
- A common ingredient in a wide variety of building materials for almost 100 years
  – Likely to be present in structures built before 1980

Where Asbestos Can Be Found On A Job Site

- Asbestos insulation applied to:
  – Pipes
  – Ducts
  – Boilers
- Asbestos surfacing materials applied to:
  – Ceilings
  – Structural members
- Asbestos building materials:
  – Floor tiles
  – Ceiling tiles
  – Mastic
  – Roofing materials
  – Walls

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Health Hazards Of Asbestos Exposure

- Increased risk of lung cancer (5 times more likely than the general public):
  - Also linked to stomach, intestine and other kinds of cancer
  - Smokers who are exposed to asbestos are up to 90 times more likely to get lung cancer
- Asbestosis:
  - Asbestos fibers inhaled deep into the lungs cause scarring, making breathing difficult
- Mesothelioma:
  - A form of cancer that attacks the lining of the chest or abdomen; this cancer is rare, but is always fatal

Identifying A Potential Asbestos Hazard

- When working in a building built prior to 1980, take time to inspect your surroundings
- Asbestos-containing materials in good condition and left undisturbed are not harmful:
  - Do not touch, damage, or disturb them in any way
- Be on the lookout for friable asbestos; this means the material is in extremely bad shape and appears soft, crumbled, or pulverized like a dusty powder:
  - Friable fibers can easily become airborne, even if only slightly disturbed

Protecting Yourself From Asbestos Exposure

- If you come across materials that could contain asbestos that appear friable:
  - Do not disturb them
  - Contact your supervisor
- Samples of the material will be analyzed in a laboratory:
  - Treat anything that looks like it could contain asbestos as if it does—no work should take place in the area until sampling results show the area to be safe
  - Sampling and abating asbestos is not your job and needs to be done by a qualified professional
  - If the sample is determined to be asbestos, the material must be removed or otherwise rendered harmless before work begins in the area