KCA TOOL BOX TALK:
Asbestos Hazard Classification

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Asbestos is the generic term for a group of naturally occurring, fibrous minerals with high tensile strength, flexibility, and resistance to heat, chemicals, and electricity.

Asbestos fibers enter the body when a person inhales or ingests airborne particles that become embedded in the tissues of the respiratory or digestive systems. Exposure to asbestos can cause disabling or fatal diseases such as asbestosis, an emphysema-like condition; lung cancer; mesothelioma, a cancerous tumor that spreads rapidly in the cells of membranes covering the lungs and body organs; and gastrointestinal cancer. The symptoms of these diseases generally do not appear for 20 or more years after initial exposure.

In the construction industry, asbestos can be found in installed products such as sprayed-on fireproofing, pipe insulation, floor tiles, cement pipe and sheet, roofing felts and shingles, ceiling tiles, fire-resistant drywall, drywall joint compounds, and acoustical products. Because very few asbestos containing products are being installed today, most worker exposures occur during the removal of asbestos and the renovation and maintenance of buildings and structures containing asbestos.

The OSHA standard establishes a classification system for asbestos construction work that spells out mandatory work practices that employers must follow to reduce worker exposures. Under this system, the following four classes of construction work are matched with increasingly stringent control requirements.

Class I:

This is the most hazardous class of asbestos jobs. This work involves the removal of asbestos-containing thermal system insulation and sprayed-on or troweled-on surfacing materials. Employers must presume that thermal system insulation and surfacing material found in pre-1981 construction is ACM. Thermal system insulation includes ACM applied to pipes, boilers, tanks, ducts, or other structural components to prevent heat loss or gain. Surfacing materials include decorative plaster on ceilings and walls; acoustical materials on decking, walls, and ceilings; and fireproofing on structural members.

Class II:

This work includes the removal of other types of ACM that are not thermal system insulation such as resilient flooring and roofing materials. Examples of Class II work include removal of asbestos-containing floor or ceiling tiles, siding, roofing, or transite panels.

Class III:

This work includes repair and maintenance operations where ACM or presumed ACM (PACM) are disturbed.

Class IV:

This work includes custodial activities where employees clean up asbestos-containing waste and debris produced by construction, maintenance, or repair activities. This work involves cleaning dust-contaminated surfaces, vacuuming contaminated carpets, mopping floors, and cleaning up ACM or PACM from thermal system insulation or surfacing material.

*** Click here for a quick reference field guide to the above class requirements**

For more information visit OSHA REGULATIONS: 1926.1101

Keystone Contractors Association Jon@KeystoneContractors.com 717-731-6272