



The Office of Compliance Supports “National Asbestos Awareness Week”

The Office of Compliance (OOC) applauds the United States Senate for designating the first week of April 2013 as “National Asbestos Awareness Week.” The resolution leads with the fact that, although asbestos fibers are invisible and cannot be smelled or tasted, inhaling them can cause significant damage.

Asbestos is the name given to a group of silicate fibers that can be separated into thin, flexible and durable threads. These fibers are resistant to heat, fire, and chemicals. They do not conduct electricity. Because of these features, asbestos was widely used until the 1980s in many of the facilities in the Capitol Complex. Unless laboratory analyses of the materials indicate otherwise, the following items constructed no later than 1980 must be presumed to contain asbestos:

- Sprayed fireproofing on structural steelwork in buildings.
- Thermal insulation used as lagging for heaters, boilers, pipes and hot water tanks to retain heat or cold.
- Acoustic or decorative finishes on ceilings and walls, and acoustic tiles and paneling.
- Asbestos-cement products, including roofing materials, electric insulation, laboratory bench tops, and water and sewage piping systems.
- Door gaskets on furnaces and stoves, pipeline wrap, heat protective mats, and electrical insulation.
- Vinyl floor tiles or vinyl sheet flooring.
- Sealants and adhesives, especially mastics underneath tiles.

Exposure to asbestos can result in lung cancer, asbestosis, and mesothelioma. The incidence of lung cancer increases markedly in smokers exposed to asbestos. Asbestosis is the scarring of the lungs that decreases the ability to exchange oxygen. It can lead to fatal cardiopulmonary disease. Mesothelioma is a rare, untreatable cancer of the membrane lining the lungs, chest, heart, and abdomen. Asbestos exposure is virtually the exclusive cause of mesothelioma. Studies have also shown that asbestos exposure may lead to cancer of the stomach and colon.

As an employee of the Legislative Branch you must be informed of the presence of asbestos materials in the areas where you work. If you suspect you might be exposed to asbestos materials, notify your safety and health officer or your supervisor of your concerns. If you continue to feel asbestos is present in your workplace, you can contact the OOC at 202-724-9250 and request an inspection of your office. Request can be made to the OOC confidentially. You can also find additional information on our website, www.compliance.gov, and by clicking on the links below:

- The Office of Compliance Fast Facts webpage: http://www.compliance.gov/wp-content/uploads/2010/03/fastfacts_asbestos.pdf
- The Occupational Safety and Health Administration’s webpage: <http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/asbestos/index.html>
- The Environmental Protection Agency’s webpage: <http://www.epa.gov/asbestos/>
- The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ASTDR) FAQ on asbestos: <http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/toxfaqs/tf.asp?id=29&tid=4>