



Vermiculite Attic Insulation

Vermiculite is a naturally occurring mineral that has the unusual property of expanding into worm-like accordion shaped pieces when heated. The expanded vermiculite is a light-weight, fire-resistant, absorbent, and odorless material. These properties allow vermiculite to be used to make numerous products, including attic insulation.

Prior to its close in 1990, much of the world's supply of vermiculite came from a mine near Libby, Montana. This mine had a natural deposit of asbestos which resulted in the vermiculite being contaminated with asbestos. Attic insulation produced using vermiculite ore, particularly ore that originated from the Libby mine, may contain asbestos fibers. Today, vermiculite is mined at three U.S. facilities and in other countries which have low levels of contamination in the finished material.

Asbestos can cause health problems when inhaled into the lungs. If products containing asbestos are disturbed, thin, lightweight asbestos fibers are released into the air. Persons breathing the air may breathe in asbestos fibers. Continued exposure increases the amount of fibers that remain in the lung. Fibers embedded in lung tissue over time may result in lung diseases such as asbestosis, lung cancer, or mesothelioma. Smoking increases your risk of developing illness from asbestos exposure.

What should I do if I have vermiculite attic insulation?

DO NOT DISTURB IT. Any disturbance has the potential to release asbestos fibers into the air. Limiting the number of trips you make to your attic and shortening the length of those trips can help limit your potential exposure.

EPA and ATSDR strongly recommend that:

- Vermiculite insulation be left **undisturbed** in your attic. Due to the uncertainties with existing testing techniques, it is best to assume that the material may contain asbestos.
- You should not store boxes or other items in your attic if retrieving the material will disturb the insulation.
- Children should not be allowed to play in an attic with open areas of vermiculite insulation.
- 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.
- You should **never attempt** to remove the insulation yourself. Hire professionals trained and certified to safely remove the material.

What if I occasionally have to go into my attic?

EPA and ATSDR strongly recommend that homeowners make every effort **not to disturb** vermiculite insulation in their attics. If you occasionally have to go into your attic, current best practices state you should:

1. Make every effort to stay on the floored part of your attic and to not disturb the insulation.
2. If you **must** perform activities that may disturb the attic insulation such as moving boxes (or other materials), do so as gently as possible to minimize the disturbance.
3. Leave the attic immediately after the disturbance.
4. If you need work done in your attic such as the installation of cable or utility lines, hire trained and certified professionals who can safely do the work.
5. It is possible that vermiculite attic insulation can sift through cracks in the ceiling, around light fixtures, or around ceiling fans. You can prevent this by sealing the cracks and holes that insulation could pass through.
6. Common dust masks are **not effective** against asbestos fibers. For information on the requirements for wearing a respirator mask, visit the following OSHA website:

<http://www.osha-slc.gov/SLTC/respiratoryprotection/index.html>

Source: www.epa.gov/asbestos

For additional information, or to schedule an inspection, please call (608) 434-0790

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