



BACKGROUND

Vermiculite is a mica-like mineral mined around the world and used for a variety of commercial and consumer products. Vermiculite is a unique product because it is fire-resistant and has good insulation properties. Vermiculite ore extracted by the Libby Mine in Montana (as well as other mines) between 1920 and 1990 may be contaminated with Asbestos. The asbestos contaminated vermiculite sold in Canada was sold under a variety of brand names including “Zonolite”. Most vermiculite products produced between 1920-1990 originated from the Libby Mine, therefore to be safe, assume that if your building has vermiculite, the vermiculite contains asbestos.

HEALTH RISKS

Asbestos is generally only dangerous when it becomes airborne. The overall percentages of asbestos in vermiculite are relatively low. This low percentage of asbestos fibers can be a poor indicator of potential health risk related to asbestos containing vermiculite due to the loose nature of the vermiculite. Because the asbestos fibers are not enclosed within the product (as with many other asbestos containing materials), the fibers can easily be made airborne when disturbed.

Disturbed vermiculite contaminated with asbestos could create dangerously high concentrations of asbestos fibers in the air. When asbestos fibers are inhaled they can cause a variety of illnesses including asbestosis, mesothelioma and lung cancer.

ASBESTOS AND YOUR HOME

If the vermiculite contains asbestos it will one day have to be removed by technicians trained and equipped to safely remove asbestos. All maintenance or renovation activities which have the potential of disturbing the vermiculite must be postponed until after the vermiculite is removed.

During the course of a real estate transaction, buyers will often demand that the removal be completed before closing on the property. Furthermore, most buyers will want assurances that the material was removed properly.

HOW TO PROTECT YOUR FAMILY

The best way to minimize your risk with asbestos contaminated vermiculite is to avoid disturbing it in any way. If the contaminated vermiculite is properly contained and the proper precautions are taken, it poses very little risk to occupants of the building. If the vermiculite needs to be removed, contact trained professionals.

IDENTIFICATION

Asbestos can only be detected by means of laboratory testing. Vermiculite samples must be taken from the bottom of the joist to ensure accurate results. Only trained inspectors or consultants should take samples to ensure that the sampling does not disturb the vermiculite and make the asbestos airborne. The lab results will identify if your vermiculite is contaminated with asbestos.