

Asbestos-containing pipes in municipal underground works projects

The network of asbestos-containing pipes in B.C. is aging or failing. As a result, it's being replaced over time. Municipalities, contractors working on municipal projects, and other employers have responsibilities for the safe handling and disposal of asbestos-containing materials. This information sheet outlines the potential hazards and explains the existing regulations and required procedures for removing asbestos-containing pipes.

What are asbestos-containing pipes?

Decommissioned pipes that have served as water main lines, waste water main lines, secondary lines, and service lines are made up of cement that contains asbestos. Aged, failing pipes, from which the binding materials have leached, can be up to 80 percent asbestos.

When pipes are decommissioned and the water that ran through them is removed, the asbestos-containing pipes collapse, fracture, and degrade into small pieces, becoming friable asbestos.

What are the risks to workers?

Friable asbestos poses a risk of asbestos exposure to workers. When disturbed, friable asbestos fibres can be released into the air and inhaled. Accumulated exposure to asbestos is a well-documented risk factor for several diseases, including asbestosis, lung cancer, and mesothelioma.

What responsibilities do employers have?

When planning and bidding for municipal work, both municipalities and contractors need to consider the management of decommissioned asbestos-containing pipes in the work zone.

Section 6.7(1) of the Occupational Health and Safety Regulation requires friable asbestos-containing materials in the workplace to be controlled by removal, enclosure, or encapsulation.

- Reburying asbestos-containing pipes in soil does not effectively encapsulate or enclose the asbestos, so unless you are otherwise encapsulating the pipes, you must ensure that degrading pipes are removed from the work area and disposed of appropriately.
- You must maintain an inventory of all asbestos-containing materials in the workplace, including asbestos-containing pipes that extend beyond the work area.
- You must have an exposure control plan for asbestos that includes safe work procedures for the removal of asbestos-containing pipes.

Why do asbestos-containing pipes need to be removed?

Removing asbestos-containing pipes is the most effective way to mitigate the risk of workers' exposure to asbestos during current and future projects.

How much needs to be removed?

You must remove all degrading asbestos-containing pipes uncovered within the excavation area in underground municipal works projects.

What should I do with asbestos-containing pipes in the ground that extend beyond the excavation?

You're not required to remove asbestos-containing pipes that extend beyond your excavation. However, employers are required to maintain an inventory of asbestos-containing pipes that remain buried.

Once I remove asbestos-containing pipes from the worksite, what should I do with them?

You must use safe disposal methods when removing decommissioned asbestos-containing pipes uncovered during underground work (see [sections 6.25–6.28](#) of the Regulation).

Where can I go for more information?

Information is available through your local Prevention officer. You can also:

- Call WorkSafeBC's Prevention Information Line at 604.276.3100 in the Lower Mainland or toll-free at 1.888.621.7233 (1.888.621.SAFE).
- Find out more about Part 6 of the Occupational Health and Safety Regulation at [worksafebc.com/searchable-regulation](https://www.worksafebc.com/searchable-regulation).