



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS PYROBAR AND OTHER FREQUENTLY NEGATIVE MISCELLANEOUS ASBESTOS CONTAINING MATERIALS

My real estate development company is in the process of renovating a large multi-story office building for conversion into apartments. The building was originally constructed in the early 1900's and has had periodic interior renovations. A prior asbestos survey has identified floor tile and transite as asbestos containing. A future tenant has asked questions concerning potential asbestos associated with the vertical columns (which house structural steel beams) found on each floor. These column enclosures are constructed of Pyrobar. Does Pyrobar contain asbestos?



ANSWER: Pyrobar is a fire resistant gypsum-based product (manufactured by US Gypsum) used in construction of schools, commercial buildings, hospitals, apartment buildings and residential properties between 1903 and the 1960's. Pyrobar is white or light gray in color and was made in light-weight blocks secured together by mortar which is stacked upon one another resulting in rapid wall-like construction.

Does Pyrobar contain asbestos? Until recently my answer would have been no. But recent bulk sampling confirmed a content of 3% anthophyllite asbestos at a property. Remember you must test the block and the mortar separately. The mortar is more likely to contain asbestos.

The extent to which Pyrobar is a potential asbestos hazard to your renovation is based on the condition of the columns and your needs to disturb/make tie-ins to the columns. Pyrobar is generally covered with sheetrock or plaster and painted. The asbestos is as such contained or enclosed.

Where limited disturbance or tie-ins are required, asbestos containing Pyrobar removal must be performed by licensed/trained asbestos personnel. A mini-enclosure (similar to a telephone booth) can be constructed around each column and vented with HEPA filtration which will save on both time and money spent. Larger scale removal of all columns is rarely performed.

NOTE: In addition to housing the structural steel, vertical columns frequently contain asbestos pipe insulation on steam risers which feed radiators on older buildings and provide a chaseway for air currents to pass.

The EPA estimates there are over 3000 known building materials and items which were manufactured that contain asbestos. When you hire an experienced environmental contracting firm (**such as AET**), your property renovations will include the following health and safety measures regarding asbestos.

1. Identification of your specific scope of renovations pertaining to the building materials which will be impacted. Testing all materials for asbestos content.
2. Sampling all layers of materials down to the substrate and include mastics, glues, etc. Testing each layer separately unless composite sampling for demolition is being performed.
3. Taking sufficient samples to confirmed negative asbestos content per EPA AHERA regulations. At least 2 samples of miscellaneous suspect asbestos containing materials such as Pyrobar is required.
4. Performing TEM analysis of NOB samples (such as floor tile, mastics, roofing, etc.) where mandated by State law.

NOTE: Don't assume negative results based on past experience. Sample analysis is very affordable compared to the liability of being wrong. EPA AHERA regulations identify (by an Accredited Building Inspector) only fiberglass, foam glass and rubber materials to be considered non-asbestos containing without sampling.

When you need professional help or advice, email Alan Sutherland, CIH, CHMM at a.sutherland@aetinc.biz or call 610-891-0114. We provide nationwide services; phone consultations are free. Check out the full range of environmental contracting/consulting services we provide at our website www.aetinc.biz.

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