

Asbestos: Where It Is & Testing

Which materials in pre-1990 Calgary homes may contain asbestos, how bulk samples are taken and analysed, and what a lab report means

4 Expert Answers from Remediation IQ

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Is sheet vinyl backing a common asbestos source in Calgary homes?

Sheet vinyl flooring installed in a pre-1990 Calgary home is one of the materials Alberta OHS bulletin ASB004 identifies as a potential asbestos source, and the Alberta Asbestos Abatement Manual sets the risk class for removing sheet vinyl with an asbestos backing by the area removed.

The backing layer, not the wear surface, is where asbestos may be present. Health Canada says asbestos material in good condition and left undisturbed presents no significant health risk; a flooring replacement cuts, tears and scrapes the backing, which is exactly the disturbance to avoid. Looking at the backing tells you nothing. The only way to know is a bulk sample sent to a lab using polarized light microscopy. Published Calgary-area prices for a single bulk sample run from \$65 to \$145, with packages of several samples costing less per sample.

For a renovation or demolition permit in Calgary, the City's Asbestos Abatement Information Form must be submitted before the permit is released. The form requires the applicant to declare either that all materials with the potential to release fibres have been removed from the project area and disposed of properly, or that none are present. If a lab result confirms asbestos in the backing, the contractor must file a 72-hour notification with Alberta OHS before beginning any work that may release fibres, and every worker who enters the restricted area must carry an original, valid Alberta asbestos worker card issued after completing a government-approved course. There is no contractor licence for asbestos abatement in Alberta; the worker card and the notification are the credentials that exist in law.

The Manual classifies removal of more than 9.3 square metres (100 square feet) of sheet vinyl with asbestos backing as high risk. Smaller areas may fall into the moderate-risk category, but cutting or scraping the backing in any quantity is not low-risk work. A fair quote for this job should include bulk sampling before work begins, a containment plan, disposal at Shepard landfill (the only Calgary facility that accepts asbestos, by permit and appointment only, at \$220 per tonne since February 2026), and an air clearance test conducted by a consultant independent of the abatement crew. Ask to see each worker's card and ask the contractor to show you the OHS notification confirmation before anyone starts.

If the backing has already been disturbed, stop the work immediately, leave the area, close the door behind you, keep everyone including pets out, and do not sweep or vacuum. Have the material tested before anyone goes back in.

If you want to connect with local abatement contractors, the form on this page forwards your request to contractors listed in the Calgary Construction Network directory.

What if an Alberta asbestos lab report says trace amounts?

What "Trace" Means on an Alberta Asbestos Report

A result reported as "trace" or "less than 1 per cent" on a polarized light microscopy (PLM) bulk sample report means the lab detected asbestos fibres but at a concentration too low to quantify precisely. The Alberta Asbestos Abatement Manual describes PLM as reporting results from 1 to 100 per cent, with anything below that threshold recorded as less than 1 per cent. Trace is not zero, and it is not a clearance.

What matters next is what you plan to do with the material. Health Canada advises that undisturbed material in good condition, sealed behind walls or floors or isolated in an attic, presents no significant health risk. If the material stays put and no renovation touches it, a trace result may require no immediate action. If you plan to cut, sand, break or remove it, settle how it will be handled before anyone starts. The Alberta OHS Code's 72-hour notification requirement applies to any employer removing or abating asbestos-containing material before activities that may release fibres, with no minimum quantity threshold. A trace result does not exempt a contractor from that obligation.

The risk class the contractor assigns matters too. The Alberta Asbestos Abatement Manual describes low, moderate and high risk categories based on how likely the work is to generate airborne fibres. A trace result in a non-friable material handled without cutting or breaking may fall into the low-risk description, but the same material drilled, sanded or demolished can move into moderate or high risk. Ask the contractor to explain in writing which risk class they are assigning and why, because that decision drives containment, air monitoring and clearance requirements.

A few things worth confirming before any work proceeds:

- Ask whether point counting was done. The Manual says point counting gives a more reliable quantification than a standard PLM estimate.
- Confirm the lab participates in a proficiency testing program. Alberta law does not require lab accreditation, but the Manual describes participation as best practice.
- Ask for the clearance standard the contractor will meet. The Manual describes final air results below 0.01 fibres per cubic centimetre for moderate-risk work, with aggressive sampling if a containment was used; for low-risk work it expects monitoring to stay below that level during all phases.
- Ask whether clearance sampling will be done by a consultant independent of the abatement crew, and which lab will count the samples.

On disposal, Alberta's asbestos disposal guidelines define asbestos waste as material with more than 1 per cent asbestos by weight, and a result below 1 per cent sits under that line. The Alberta OHS Code has its own definition,

which binds the contractor's handling: material discarded because there is a reasonable chance that asbestos might be released from it and become airborne. That definition turns on release, not on a percentage, and the Code requires such waste in sealed, impervious, labelled containers. Ask the contractor and the landfill how they will classify the debris before anything is binned. Material handled as asbestos waste in Calgary goes to Shepard landfill only, with a permit and appointment, wetted, double-bagged in 6-mil polyethylene and sealed, at \$220 per tonne.

You can submit the report details through the request form on this page and local abatement contractors listed in the Calgary Construction Network directory will respond by email.

The question that saves the most confusion later: is clearance air testing in the quoted price, or billed separately afterwards?

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Should I test before drilling into a textured ceiling in Calgary?

Yes, test first. If your home was built before 1990, the Alberta Asbestos Abatement Manual lists acoustic and stippled ceiling finishes among the materials that may contain asbestos, and it notes that joint compound and stipple may not have been mixed evenly, so asbestos content can vary from one spot to another in the same house.

A bulk sample lab test runs \$65 to \$145 per sample in the Calgary area, based on published prices read in September 2026. Packages of several samples cost less per sample, which matters here because uneven mixing means one clear result may not speak for the whole ceiling.

What the result changes

If every sample taken from that ceiling comes back clear, you can drill with ordinary precautions. If it finds asbestos, the risk class under the Alberta Asbestos Abatement Manual depends on what you do next. Drilling into it is not on the Manual's low-risk list, which covers non-friable products handled without cutting, breaking, sanding or vibrating. Ceiling texture is not handled that way, so the work belongs with a contractor, and any worker who enters an asbestos restricted area must hold a government-approved Alberta asbestos worker card. The Alberta OHS Code requires the employer to notify a Director at least 72 hours before beginning any activity that may release fibres, and that notification must be filed before work starts, with no minimum quantity triggering it.

Health Canada's position is plain: do not disturb asbestos-containing material and do not attempt removal yourself. Alberta Environment's guidance says friable asbestos-containing materials should not be disturbed and handling

should be restricted to qualified personnel.

If you have already drilled and the ceiling is now damaged or dusty: stop the work, leave the area, keep others and pets out, close the door, do not sweep or vacuum, and have the material tested before anyone goes back in.

The City of Calgary side.

If your project involves a renovation that needs a building permit, the City of Calgary requires an Asbestos Abatement Information Form before releasing the permit. That form asks you to declare either that all materials with the potential to release fibres have been removed from the project area and disposed of at an approved landfill, or that none are present. Asbestos waste in Calgary goes to Shepard landfill only, double-bagged in 6-mil polyethylene, wetted before bagging, sealed, and by appointment made before 10 a.m. the prior day.

What to ask before hiring.

If testing confirms asbestos and you bring in a contractor, ask to see each worker's original asbestos worker card, ask for a copy of the 72-hour OHS notification before anyone starts, and ask for clearance air testing done by a consultant who is independent of the abatement crew, with results from a lab using TEM or PCM methods. The Manual describes a clearance target of below 0.01 fibres per cubic centimetre for moderate-risk work.

If you would rather have a contractor take the samples, the form on this page reaches local abatement contractors.

Before you commit, ask the contractor to spell out in writing exactly what containment, clearance testing and Shepard disposal are included in the quoted price, so there are no surprises after signing.

Are ceiling tiles in an older Calgary basement likely asbestos?

If your Calgary basement has drop ceiling tiles and the building was constructed before 1990, there is a real possibility those tiles contain asbestos. Alberta OHS bulletin ASB004 lists ceiling tiles among the materials with higher asbestos risk in pre-1990 buildings, and the Alberta Asbestos Abatement Manual notes asbestos has been found in buildings constructed into the early 1990s as well.

The only way to know for certain is to have a sample tested. A bulk sample goes to a lab for polarized light microscopy analysis, which reports the asbestos content by percentage. Published Calgary-area prices for that test run \$65 to \$145 per sample, with multi-sample packages costing less per sample. If you have several tile types or tiles from different areas, each distinct material counts as a separate sample.

What this means for your renovation

Ceiling tiles matter because of what happens when they come down. The Alberta Asbestos Abatement Manual describes the risk level by how much fibre a task is likely to release. Removing 9.3 square metres (100 square feet) or less of ceiling tile falls under moderate-risk work; removing more than that is high-risk. Every worker who enters an asbestos restricted area must hold a government-approved Alberta asbestos worker card. Before any work begins, the contractor must file a notification with Alberta OHS at least 72 hours in advance through the provincial asbestos portal. The OHS Code sets no minimum quantity that triggers this requirement.

The City of Calgary adds its own step: before a building permit or demolition permit is released for a pre-1990 building, the applicant must submit the City's Asbestos Abatement Information Form declaring that asbestos-containing materials have either been removed from the project area and disposed of at an approved landfill, or are not present. That form is separate from the OHS notification. If asbestos is found after a permit has already been issued, work stops immediately, the OHS notification is filed, and a building permit revision is submitted.

When you get quotes, a fair one should include:

- A written scope covering containment setup, worker protection and decontamination procedures
- Confirmation that workers will carry valid Alberta asbestos worker cards (ask to see them)
- The 72-hour OHS notification as part of the contractor's process, not something left to you
- Disposal at Shepard landfill, the only Calgary facility that accepts asbestos, with a permit and appointment arranged in advance
- An independent air clearance test after removal, done by a consultant separate from the abatement crew, with results from a third-party lab

Do not disturb the tiles in the meantime. Health Canada's guidance on asbestos-containing materials in good condition, sealed in place and undisturbed, is that they present no significant health risk. If a tile is already damaged or crumbling, keep people and pets out of the area and have it assessed before any further work.

The one question worth asking before you hire: which consultant will take the clearance samples, and which lab will count them? Clearance done by the same crew that did the removal is not independent.

If you want to hear from local Calgary abatement contractors, the request form on this page sends your details to contractors listed in the Calgary Construction Network directory who work in this area.

Disclaimer: This guide is provided for informational purposes only by Calgary Mold Remediation. It does not constitute professional advice. Always consult qualified, licensed contractors and your local building authority (the City of Calgary or your own municipality) and Alberta Occupational Health and Safety before starting any asbestos, mould or lead paint project. Information is current as of October 25, 2026 and may change. Visit calgarymoldremediation.com for the latest answers.