How NOT to Handle an Asbestos Removal Project



Although asbestos is no longer used in materials in most countries, it can still pose a hazard to workers under certain circumstances, such as when renovating older buildings. That's why the removal and disposal of materials containing asbestos is highly regulated under both OHS and environmental laws. (Learn more about the hazards posed by this substance.)

Yes, complying with the asbestos requirements can be challenging. But a contractor in Ontario did just about everything wrong in dealing with this hazardous substance'and paid the price as a result.

The contractor, who offered asbestos removal services, was working with at least one worker removing asbestos-containing insulation from a house's attic. The Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change, along with the police, began an investigation when two separate incidents of illegal dumping were reported.

The joint investigation found the following violations:

- The work area wasn't separated and sealed off from the rest of the home while the removal was being done with a large vacuum system;
- No decontamination facilities were in place to prevent the spread of dust;
- The work area wasn't identified with any signs warning of an asbestos dust hazard;

- The contractor and worker didn't wear any protective clothing (just jeans and t-shirts);
- Containers for the dust and waste weren't dust tight or identified as asbestos waste;
- Respirators worn by the contractor and the worker weren't fit-tested and they weren't trained on the use of this PPE;
- The MOL hadn't been notified about the asbestos removal work;
- The contractor didn't have a copy of the *OHS Act* posted in the workplace;
- There was no written health and safety policy for the workplace;
- The contractor told the homeowner that the asbestos removal work was being done in accordance with the laws and that he was certified to perform this work, neither of which were true;
- The contractor hadn't completed the required training for asbestos work;
- The homeowner and two other people were present in the home during part of the removal; and
- The contractor dumped 13 large vacuum bags, each measuring five to six feet in length and weighing several hundred pounds, on private property. The bags were full of asbestos-containing insulation, weren't properly sealed and had no markings to warn the public about the contents.

As a result, a court convicted the contractor of nine OHS violations, finding that 'this was a case of clear deceit and misrepresentation' and that the contractor had 'shown a total disregard not only for the health and safety of his workers but also for the public.' The court sentenced the contractor to 30 days' jail and imposed a $45,000 fine [*Daniel Lane*, Govt. News Release, Jan. 15, 2016].

Bottom line: If your workers are at risk of exposure to

materials containing asbestos, do not make the many mistakes the above contractor made. Instead, take these four steps to protect them from this hazardous substance.