

Conservator Hack – Asbestos

By Jane Dalley, CSP Conservator

Asbestos was used up until the 1990s as a fire-retardant and an insulator in many household appliances and products, and in many construction materials. When asbestos dries out, it can crack and crumble, and release asbestos fibres that are 100 times thinner than a human hair. When these fibres are inhaled, they pose a health risk that can lead to serious respiratory conditions.

Museums may find asbestos present in a wide variety of artifacts such as kitchen items and appliances (irons, kettles, ironing board covers, stoves), automobiles, theatre scenery, dioramas, fireplaces, furniture (couches) and military, mining and fire-fighting clothing and equipment.

It may not be possible or appropriate to remove asbestos from an artifact, but it is important to identify the artifact, note that it contains asbestos, and ensure that it is stable. This information is necessary when acquiring, transporting, moving or exhibiting artifacts that contain asbestos.

Staff and volunteers can protect themselves by wearing appropriate PPE (protective personal equipment) such as a face mask and gloves when handling artifacts that contain stable asbestos. Asbestos that is not deteriorating can be sealed or encapsulated if it could be damaged through handling, moving or exhibit.

Asbestos may also be present in an older building in ceiling and floor tiles, pipe insulation, roof shingles, house siding, stucco, cement and paint. Contact Manitoba Workplace Health and Safety before disposing of asbestos-containing materials arising from renovations or demolitions, as there are regulations for its handling and disposal. Artifacts that contain deteriorating asbestos must be disposed of, and safely, by someone trained in the process. For information, contact Manitoba Health and Safety at:

Phone: 204-957-SAFE (7233)

Toll-free: 1-855-957-SAFE (7233)

www.manitoba.ca/labour/safety/

Information on asbestos can be found on the Manitoba government site at

https://www.gov.mb.ca/labour/safety/wsh_faqs_asbestos.html

The following links provide more information on asbestos in museums, and how it is being addressed:

<https://www.socotec.co.uk/news/blog/archive/a-hidden-legacy-the-importance-of-asbestos-management-in-museums-ancient-collections-and-historic-objects/>

<https://documents.techno-science.ca/documents/Appendix2AsbestosManagementPlan.pdf>

If you have any questions or concerns about artifacts in your collections, feel free to contact the CSP conservator at conservator@museumsmanitoba.com.

Conservator Hack – Things I Find Interesting

Switchless Drawer Light

Do you have a visible storage exhibit system with artifacts stored in drawers that are pulled open by visitors? A dark closet with clothing on (padded) hangers? This LED drawer light is vibration activated and battery operated so you can place it wherever you need occasional light. (Please note that standard precautions for exhibit lighting still apply.)

[Switchless Drawer Light](#)

