OTTAWA ABATEMENT

Asbestos: Where It Is & Testing

Which materials in older Ottawa homes may contain asbestos, how bulk samples are taken, and what the 0.5 per cent threshold in a lab report means

4 Expert Answers from Abatement IQ

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Table of Contents

1. Is spackling in an older Ottawa home an asbestos risk?
2. Is textured paint on my Westboro walls an asbestos risk?
3. Are old furnace parts in Ottawa homes a source of asbestos?
4. Why test more than one spot of drywall in an Ottawa house?

Q1

Is spackling in an older Ottawa home an asbestos risk?

Spackling in an older Ottawa home is worth treating as a potential asbestos risk until a lab test says otherwise. Health Canada lists "spackling" among older building materials that may contain asbestos, and Ontario's guide lists "joint compounds" in the same category.

Whether disturbing it becomes a Type 1, Type 2 or Type 3 operation under O. Reg. 278/05 depends on two things the contractor assesses on site: whether the material is friable, and how much area is being worked. Removing less than one square metre of drywall where asbestos joint-filling compounds were used is classified as Type 1. Removing one square metre or more of that drywall moves the work into Type 2. Section 12(5) says work on ceiling tiles, drywall or friable asbestos-containing material is classified according to the total area on which work is done consecutively in a room or enclosed area, even if the work is divided into smaller jobs. Because friability is decided on site, never assume the Type from a description or a photo; ask the contractor to confirm the Type in writing before work starts.

For Type 3 work, the employer must notify a Ministry of Labour inspector orally and in writing before starting, and every worker must have completed the Asbestos Abatement Worker Training Program and every supervisor the Asbestos Abatement Supervisor Training Program, as required by sections 20(1) and 20(2) of O. Reg. 278/05. A clearance air test under section 18 applies to Type 3 work. We found no clearance test requirement in the Type 1 and Type 2 sections of the regulation, though you can ask for one in the quote.

Before any work touches the material, a pre-renovation inspection with asbestos testing runs roughly $250 to $1,300 depending on building size and number of samples, based on published Ontario contractor prices read in September 2026. If the spackling does contain asbestos, removal of drywall joint compound runs roughly $10 to $15 per square foot under the same published prices, alongside the general asbestos removal range of $8 to $15 per square foot. A fair quote should name the Type, describe how waste will be packaged and transported under Ontario Regulation 347, identify which disposal site has agreed to accept it, and search the contractor's current WSIB clearance online.

If the material has already been disturbed, the right move is to stop the work, don't disturb it further, and have a professional test it; Health Canada advises professional testing.

Q2

Is textured paint on my Westboro walls an asbestos risk?

Textured paint on walls built before 1990 is worth taking seriously before any renovation work. Health Canada lists paint among older building materials that may contain asbestos, and Ontario's guide to O. Reg. 278/05 lists textured paints and coatings specifically.

Whether your walls are actually a risk depends on two things: whether the material tests positive at 0.5 per cent or more asbestos by dry weight (the threshold set by O. Reg. 278/05, section 3(4)), and whether you plan to disturb it. Health Canada is clear that there are no significant health risks if materials containing asbestos are left undisturbed and in good condition. The risk comes from renovation activities: drilling, sawing, sanding, scraping or breaking the surface apart.

If you do plan to sand, skim or remove the texture, the work falls under O. Reg. 278/05. The Type the contractor assigns depends on whether the material is friable and how much area is being disturbed, assessed on site. A contractor who removes more than one square metre of friable material is in Type 3 territory, which requires workers to have completed the Asbestos Abatement Worker Training Program approved by the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development, and requires the constructor or employer to notify a Ministry of Labour inspector, orally and in writing, before work begins. Type 3 work also requires clearance air testing once the enclosure is dry: every air sample must show no more than 0.01 fibres per cubic centimetre of air using the PCM method, or pass a statistical comparison using TEM. Type 1 and Type 2 operations have their own controls set out in the regulation, though clearance air testing does not appear in those sections.

The owner-occupier exemption in section 2(4) of O. Reg. 278/05 covers your duties as a homeowner, but any contractor you hire is bound by the regulation in full. Health Canada advises hiring a professional to test before renovating and a qualified asbestos removal specialist if asbestos is found.

A pre-renovation inspection with asbestos testing runs roughly $250 to $1,300 depending on building size and number of samples, based on published Ontario contractor prices read in September 2026. If removal is needed, general asbestos removal is published at $8 to $15 per square foot, with textured ceiling removal at $6 to $12 per square foot; wall texture pricing is not separately published, so ask for a per-square-foot figure in the quote. Asbestos waste must be transported under Ontario Regulation 347 to a disposal site whose operator has agreed to accept it, arranged before the waste leaves your home.

Ask the contractor to spell out in the quote exactly where the asbestos waste is going and which site has agreed to accept it, because that arrangement has to be confirmed before the waste leaves.

You can request a match with local abatement contractors through the form on this page; they are listed in the Ottawa Construction Network directory.

Q3

Are old furnace parts in Ottawa homes a source of asbestos?

Yes, older furnaces and their connected systems are a real place to look for asbestos-containing materials in Ottawa homes. Health Canada lists industrial furnaces and heating systems, insulation around hot water pipes and tanks, and surface treatments such as caulking and sealants among the older building materials that may contain asbestos, and says that before 1990 asbestos was mainly used for insulating buildings and homes.

Ontario's guide to O. Reg. 278/05 adds that asbestos was widely used in pipe and boiler insulation until 1973, and that many other asbestos-containing materials continued in use until the mid-1980s. Ontario's guide also lists HVAC duct insulation and pipe insulation (corrugated air-cell and block). None of these materials should be assumed safe to disturb without testing first.

What Decides the Type of Work

Whether any of this triggers a Type 1, Type 2 or Type 3 operation under O. Reg. 278/05 depends on two things the contractor assesses on site: whether the material is friable, and how much of it will be disturbed. Removing pipe or duct insulation using a glove bag is listed as a Type 2 operation, and the removal or disturbance of more than one square metre of friable asbestos-containing material is Type 3. Section 12(5) says work on ceiling tiles, drywall or friable asbestos-containing material is classified according to the total area on which work is done consecutively in a room or enclosed area, even if the work is divided into smaller jobs. Before any removal begins, ask the contractor to give you the Type classification in writing.

For Type 3 work, O. Reg. 278/05 section 11(1) requires the employer to notify a Ministry of Labour inspector, orally and in writing, before starting. Every worker on a Type 3 job must have completed the Asbestos Abatement Worker Training Program, and every supervisor the Asbestos Abatement Supervisor Training Program, as required by section 20. Clearance air testing under section 18 applies to Type 3 work; you can ask for it to be included in the quote for smaller jobs as well.

Published Ontario contractor prices read in September 2026 put pipe or duct insulation removal at roughly $35 to $55 per linear foot, against about $8 to $15 per square foot for asbestos removal in general. A pre-removal inspection with asbestos testing runs about $250 to $1,300 depending on building size and the number of samples taken.

When you get quotes, ask the contractor to confirm the Type in writing, to name the disposal site that has agreed to accept the asbestos waste under Ontario Regulation 347, and search the contractor's current WSIB clearance online.

After the work is done, keep the lab report showing what was tested and the result, the written Type classification the contractor provided, and the clearance air test results if one was done. Section 18 of O. Reg. 278/05 requires the owner to keep clearance results for at least one year, so keep the documents together.

Q4

Why test more than one spot of drywall in an Ottawa house?

Testing one spot tells you what that spot contains. It does not tell you what the rest of the house contains, and in an older Ottawa home that distinction matters a great deal.

A house that was built, added to or repaired at different times can have different materials in different rooms, and a lab result describes only the material it came from.

The same logic applies to textured coatings and other surface treatments. Ontario's guide to O. Reg. 278/05 lists joint compounds and textured paints and coatings among asbestos-containing materials, and says many such materials continued in use until the mid 1980s. Health Canada lists paint, putty, drywall, caulking and sealants among older building materials that may contain asbestos.

There is also a practical legal reason. Under O. Reg. Section 12(5) says work on ceiling tiles, drywall or friable asbestos-containing material is classified according to the total area on which work is done consecutively in a room or enclosed area, even if the work is divided into smaller jobs. That means the Type of the operation, and the rules that come with it, depend on how much material is disturbed in total, not on any single patch. If you have tested only one location and later discover a second material that also contains asbestos, the constructor or employer must notify an inspector, the owner and the joint health and safety committee or representative immediately, in writing and orally, under section 10(8). Knowing what is present before work starts avoids that disruption.

A pre-renovation inspection with asbestos testing runs roughly $250 to $1,300 depending on the size of the building and the number of samples, based on published Ontario contractor prices read in September 2026. The size of the building and the number of samples move the price.

A fair scope for testing should name each material sampled, the location of each sample, and the lab method used, which under O. Reg. 278/05 section 3(4) is EPA/600/R-93/116, with a threshold of 0.5 per cent asbestos by dry weight. Ask the person doing the testing to explain which areas they are not sampling and why, so you understand the limits of the report before any renovation work begins.

Contractors listed in the Ottawa Construction Network directory can see your request if you send it through the form on this page.

Disclaimer: This guide is provided for informational purposes only by Ottawa Abatement. It does not constitute professional advice. Always consult qualified contractors and your local building authority (the City of Ottawa or your own municipality) before starting any asbestos, mould or lead paint project. Asbestos work in Ontario is governed by O. Reg. 278/05. Information is current as of November 15, 2026 and may change. Visit **ottawaabatement.com** for the latest answers.