OTTAWA ABATEMENT

Health & Safety

What Health Canada says about undisturbed and disturbed asbestos, mould and lead, and what to do if something was disturbed

4 Expert Answers from Abatement IQ

ottawaabatement.com/construction-brain

Table of Contents

1. Should kids stay away from an Ottawa attic with vermiculite?
2. Can asbestos in Ottawa house siding harm me outdoors?
3. Does Health Canada advise hiring a pro for asbestos testing in Ottawa?
4. Mould smell in a new Ottawa rental, should I worry?

Q1

Should kids stay away from an Ottawa attic with vermiculite?

Yes, Health Canada says to keep children out of an attic that contains vermiculite insulation. That is the direct advice, and it applies regardless of whether the vermiculite has been tested.

Health Canada's position is that vermiculite-based insulation may contain asbestos. The federal vermiculite page on canada.ca adds that there is currently no evidence of risk to your health if the insulation is sealed behind wallboards and floorboards, isolated in an attic, or otherwise kept from exposure to the interior environment. The key word is isolated.

Health Canada gives these steps for a home with vermiculite insulation: don't use the attic for storage, keep children out of the attic, don't disturb it or attempt to remove it yourself, and apply caulking to seal openings or gaps around the attic hatch, baseboards, light fixtures, outlets, and window and door frames.

If you are planning a renovation that would involve the attic, Health Canada advises hiring professionals trained to handle asbestos. Vermiculite removal is a job where the amount of friable material and the method used on site determine which Type of operation it becomes under O. Reg. 278/05. That classification decides what the contractor must do: the training workers need, whether a Ministry of Labour inspector must be notified before work starts, and whether clearance air testing is required afterward. A lab test of a sample from your attic will tell you what the material actually contains, which is useful information before any contractor starts work. Published prices for a pre-renovation inspection with asbestos testing run roughly $250 to $1,300 depending on building size and number of samples, and vermiculite attic removal, if it comes to that, runs $5,000 to $25,000 per attic, based on published Ontario contractor prices read in September 2026.

On disposal, Ontario Regulation 347 requires that asbestos waste leave the site only to a disposal facility whose operator has agreed to accept it and has been told when to expect it. Ask any contractor you speak with which facility they use and confirm it has agreed to take the load before work begins.

Start with a contractor who can take a sample and have it tested: that result tells you what you are actually dealing with, and it is the information both you and any future contractor will need to make a sensible plan.

Q2

Can asbestos in Ottawa house siding harm me outdoors?

Health Canada says there are no significant health risks if materials containing asbestos are in good condition and left undisturbed. Cement siding is on Ontario's guide list of materials that may contain asbestos, and Health Canada lists house siding among older building materials that may contain it.

The key word is "undisturbed." Health Canada identifies drilling, sawing, sanding, scraping and breaking apart as renovation activities that can release fibres. Intact siding on a standing house, not being cut or abraded, is a different situation from siding being removed or repaired. If any work on the siding is planned, test it first.

If work is planned

Once a contractor touches that siding, Ontario's O. Reg. 278/05 applies to them in full, even though the owner-occupier exemption means the regulation's owner duties do not apply to you personally. The Type of work, which determines what the contractor must do by law, depends on whether the material is friable and how much area is disturbed, assessed on site. Removing non-friable asbestos-containing material without breaking or cutting it is a Type 1 operation. Breaking or cutting non-friable material using only non-powered hand-held tools with the material wetted is also Type 1. If the material is friable, or if power tools are used, the thresholds shift toward Type 2 or Type 3, and Type 3 brings a mandatory notice to a Ministry of Labour inspector before work begins, along with required training for every worker and supervisor. Section 12(5) covers ceiling tiles, drywall or friable asbestos-containing material, so if the siding turns out to be friable the total area worked consecutively counts even if the job is divided into smaller jobs. Removing non-friable siding intact is a Type 1 operation whatever its area.

Before any of that, Health Canada advises hiring a professional to test suspect material before renovating, and a qualified asbestos removal specialist if asbestos is found.

On waste: Ontario Regulation 347 requires that asbestos waste leave the site only to a disposal facility whose operator has agreed to accept it and has been told when it is coming. Ask the contractor which facility they have arranged.

A fair quote for siding removal should include the Type the contractor has assessed on site, the training and inspector notice if Type 3 applies, how the waste will be packaged and where it goes, and whether a clearance air test is included. You can also ask for a clearance air test in the quote even if the Type does not require one by law.

Before you sign, ask the contractor to confirm in writing which Type they have assessed and how they determined whether the material is friable.

Q3

Does Health Canada advise hiring a pro for asbestos testing in Ottawa?

Health Canada advises hiring a professional to test before renovating if you suspect asbestos-containing materials are present, and hiring a qualified asbestos removal specialist if asbestos is found. That advice applies whether you are in Ottawa, Kanata, Barrhaven, Orleans or anywhere else in the service area.

The reason testing matters before any renovation work starts is straightforward. Health Canada notes there are no significant health risks if materials containing asbestos are left undisturbed, isolated or tightly bound in good condition. The risk comes from renovation activities such as drilling, sawing, sanding, scraping or breaking materials apart, which can release fibres. Knowing what you have before work begins lets the contractor plan the right approach under O. Reg. 278/05.

What testing tells the contractor

Under O. Reg. 278/05, a bulk sample is treated as asbestos-containing material if it contains 0.5 per cent or more asbestos by dry weight, using the EPA/600/R-93/116 lab method. Once a material tests positive, the contractor classifies the work as Type 1, Type 2 or Type 3 depending on whether the material is friable and how much of it will be disturbed. That classification is made on site, not from a description or a photo, and it determines what controls, training and notices apply. For Type 3 work, the employer must notify a Ministry of Labour inspector before starting, and clearance air testing is required once the enclosure is dry. None of that planning is possible without a test result first.

Published prices for a pre-renovation inspection with asbestos testing, or a designated substance survey, run roughly $250 to $1,300 depending on the size of the building and the number of samples taken. Those are published Ontario contractor prices read in September 2026. The size of the building and the number of samples move the price.

If you have already disturbed a suspect material, stop the work, do not disturb it further, and have it tested by a professional before anything resumes.

For a straightforward testing question, the contractor is the right first call, because they can assess which materials to sample and give you a written scope before any work begins. If you want to understand what the regulation requires of whoever you hire, the Ministry of Labour is the place to ask.

Q4

Mould smell in a new Ottawa rental, should I worry?

A mould smell in a rental is worth taking seriously, even if you cannot see anything yet. A musty smell is a reason to look for moisture, and finding the source is the first step.

Health Canada classifies mould by what you can see. A small area is one to three patches, each less than one square metre. A medium area is more than three patches, or patches greater than one square metre but less than three square metres. An extensive area is a single patch larger than three square metres. Health Canada says you can generally clean small and medium sized areas yourself, and recommends getting professional help with extensive mould growth.

In a rental, the practical question is who is responsible for fixing it. That sits in landlord-tenant law, which this site does not cover, so check the rules that apply to tenants or ask a legal clinic. What this site can tell you is that we found no Ontario statute or regulation that licenses mould remediators or sets indoor mould limits.

For any mould job, the moisture source comes first. Cleaning mould without stopping the water that feeds it means it comes back. Once the moisture is dealt with, a reasonable post-remediation check looks at three things: the written scope of work was completed, the moisture source was repaired, and no visible mould remains.

If the building is older and any remediation involves cutting or removing drywall, plaster, ceiling texture or flooring, raise the asbestos question before work starts: Health Canada advises hiring a professional to test before renovating.

Local contractors who handle mould assessment, listed in the Ottawa Construction Network directory, reply by email to requests from the form on this page.

Before anyone starts work, ask the contractor to give you the written scope of what they plan to do and how they will confirm the job is complete.

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.