

JAN 25 1990

RECOMMENDED INTERIM GUIDELINES
FOR
STRIPPING ASBESTOS-CONTAINING FLOORS

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recommends that school officials, building owners, and custodial/maintenance staff consider the following basic guidelines when stripping wax or finish coat from asbestos-containing floor coverings:

1. AVOID STRIPPING FLOORS. Stripping of floors should be done as infrequently as possible -- perhaps once or twice or less per year depending on circumstances. The frequency should be carefully considered as floor maintenance schedules or contracts are written or renewed.
2. PROPERLY TRAIN STAFF. Custodial or maintenance staff who strip floors should be trained to operate properly and safely the machines, pads, and floor care chemicals used at the facility.
3. FOLLOW APPROPRIATE WORK PRACTICES. Custodial or maintenance staff who strip floors should follow appropriate work practices, such as those recommended here, under informed supervision. Directions from floor tile and floor wax product manufacturers on proper maintenance procedures should be consulted.
4. STRIP FLOORS WHILE WET. The floor should be kept adequately wet during the stripping operation. Do NOT perform dry stripping. Prior to machine operation, an emulsion of chemical stripper in water is commonly applied to the floor with a mop to soften the wax or finish coat. After stripping and before application of the new wax, the floor should be thoroughly cleaned, while wet.
5. RUN MACHINE AT SLOW SPEED. If the machine used to remove the wax or finish coat has variable speeds, it should be run at slow speed (about 175-190 rpm) during the stripping operation.
6. SELECT THE LEAST ABRASIVE PAD POSSIBLE. EPA recommends that the machine be equipped with the least abrasive pad possible to strip wax or finish coat from asbestos-containing floors.
7. DO NOT OVERSTRIP FLOORS. Stop stripping when the old surface coat is removed. Overstripping can damage the floor and may cause the release of asbestos fibers. Do NOT operate a floor machine with an abrasive pad on unwaxed or unfinished floors.

REMEMBER: Improperly removing asbestos-containing floor covering could result in the release of high levels of asbestos. EPA recommends that you leave asbestos-containing floor covering in place, provided the material is in good condition. However, proper maintenance procedures, such as those outlined above, should always be followed.

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Recommended Interim Guidance for Maintenance of Asbestos-Containing Floor Coverings

Attached are recommended interim guidelines for stripping wax or finish coat from asbestos-containing floors in your buildings. They were developed by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in consultation with asbestos control professionals and several flooring material and floor care product manufacturers to reduce any possible exposure to asbestos fibers.

In November 1989, the local NBC affiliate in Washington, D.C. produced and aired a 3-part series on the potential danger of stripping asbestos-containing floor tiles. The NBC network news carried a brief portion of the series on November 29. The series concluded that stripping excess wax or finish coat from asbestos-containing floor tiles in schools may increase the asbestos exposure of school maintenance personnel and school children.

The series has precipitated numerous telephone calls to EPA Headquarters and to the ten EPA Regional offices. Perhaps many of you have also received calls from parents, staff, custodial workers, and others.

Since its airing, EPA's Environmental Assistance Division has tried to explain more clearly what the series did and did not demonstrate. First, there is no clear evidence that the "routine" stripping activities described in the series produced significantly elevated levels of asbestos fibers. In fact, the air levels generated during routine stripping were below those which require special procedures under federal regulation. Thus, the levels are unlikely to cause asbestos-related health problems. Second, higher levels were produced only after a stripping machine was used on a relatively dry, unwaxed floor. Such a practice is not a normal maintenance procedure.

Since improperly performed floor tile maintenance procedures could result in an increase in asbestos exposure, EPA strongly recommends that the attached basic guidelines be followed in order to safeguard the health of building occupants.