

Asbestos: Managing Floor Tiles

Department: Chemical and General Safety

Program: Asbestos

Owner: Program Manager, John Shepardson

Authority: ES&H Manual, Chapter 27, Asbestos

Hazard Overview

In some offices, hard chair casters may grind floor tiles. Floor tiles at SLAC may contain one to two percent asbestos. Air sampling by SLAC industrial hygienists has demonstrated that asbestos dust from damaged floor tiles is not entering worker breathing zones during office activities or during the replacement of floor tiles. Although the maintenance and replacement of floor tile is not considered an employee health hazard, it is important to maintain flooring in good condition.

How to Recognize Damaged Floor Tiles

Floor tile damage caused by chair casters usually occurs as a circular wear pattern under an office chair. Damaged floor tiles have a dull, un-waxed, white, or grainy appearance. If you see damaged to floor tiles in your work area, contact your building manger immediately for assistance in choosing the best way to address the problem.

Controls for Mitigating Damage to Floor Tiles

The following are ways SLAC mitigates the damage caused by the wear from hard chair casters.

- Our floors are waxed once each year. The wax has been shown to adequately seal floor tile dust. The wet method of applying wax does not allow asbestos to get into the air during waxing.
- SLAC office chair vendors have two types of casters, one type for wood floors and one for carpeted areas. Casters for wood floors are softer than those for carpet. Most of the casters purchased at SLAC in recent years have been of the harder variety made for carpeted areas. This has contributed to the damage to our floor tiles. Replacing the hard casters with the softer type will decrease the wear on the floor tiles.

Building Manager Role in Managing Damaged Floor Tiles

Building managers should identify areas where floor tiles are damaged and contact the asbestos program manager to discuss the following options for addressing damage to floor tiles and preventing future damage.

- To avoid the potential for getting dust in the air, do not dry sweep damaged tile areas.
- Wax the floor (or just wax the circular worn area).
- Place a hard plastic mat over the wear area.
- Rearrange offices to avoid further wear on already worn floor tiles.

Asbestos: Managing Floor Tiles

- Replace the chair casters with the softer type intended for wood floors (cost is about \$25 for a set of 5 casters, which is enough for one chair). The asbestos program manager can help you determine what type of caster you have by performing tests on the contact surfaces. Hard casters that are removed will not be salvaged for reuse on site.

Replacing floor tiles damaged by chair movement is not recommended unless the tiles are broken or cracked. Replacing tiles will only temporarily fix the problem until the cause is addressed.

Employee Role in Preventing Floor Tile Damage

- All employees should report floor tile problems to their building manager.
- Ensure housekeeping subcontractor has access to every office during annual floor waxing so the floors are waxed completely.
- If you replace chair casters with the softer type, do not salvage the hard casters for use on site.

When ordering chairs for use on site, choose softer casters (those intended for wood floors) if the chairs will be used on tile flooring. SLAC Purchasing will assist you in choosing the appropriate casters.

Questions

If you have questions, please contact the asbestos program manager.