

Vinyl Asbestos Tiles

Byron A. Ellis – August 26, 2017



Vinyl asbestos tile (VAT) contains asbestos. Therefore, owners must maintain them in good condition to prevent airborne asbestos particles and should label them as asbestos-containing materials (ACM). VATs are non-friable. However, the frictional forces exerted during routine floor-care can loosen the asbestos fibers and cause them to become airborne.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) in [1910.1001\(k\)\(7\)](#) prohibits the sanding of asbestos-containing flooring materials. It recommends low abrasion pads at speeds lower than 300 rpm for stripping of finishes, and burnishing or dry buffing flooring is only appropriate for asbestos-containing floors with sufficient finish so that the pad cannot contact the ACM. Additionally, waste, debris, and accompanying dust in areas containing ACM and/or presumed asbestos-containing materials (PACM) or visibly deteriorated ACM shall not be dusted or swept dry, or vacuumed without using a high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter. Both OSHA Standards 1910.1001 and 1926.1101 address the asbestos floor tile cleaning activities.

Stripping or buffing of asbestos-containing flooring material usually comes under the scope of the General Industry Asbestos Standard. If, however, a construction company does it as part of the completion of a construction project, it comes under the scope of the Construction Asbestos Standard.

EPA recommends minimizing floor stripping of asbestos-containing floors. Staff used to strip floors should be adequately trained to use personal protective equipment (PPE) safely and to operate machines, pads, and floor care chemicals used at the facility and follow appropriate work practices, such as:

1. Strip Floors While Wet.
2. Run Machine at Slow Speed.
3. Do Not Over-Strip Floors.
4. Do Not Sand Asbestos-Containing Flooring Material.

Purchase a floor finish stripper that is appropriate for your floor with a "Green Seal" (USA) certified. Test the stripper on the part of the floor that is not readily visible before starting the job. Some older linoleum floors cannot withstand stripping, and the color may bleed. For best results, use a floor finish stripper that is the same brand as the floor wax you typically use. Apply sealer (generally two coats) and floor finish (generally three coats) as soon as the floor dries to provide a protective coating. Apply wax sparingly to avoid future wax buildups.

Encapsulation or sealing of asbestos tiles can also be accomplished by sealant or two-part epoxy process.

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