

Justice Center Asbestos – Frequently Asked Questions

(Please note: this FAQ sheet will be updated as we obtain additional information and address further questions and concerns. The link to this [FAQ sheet](#) on the [Asbestos at the Justice Center website](#) will remain static, so please feel free to check back periodically to see what has been added.)

Have something to add to this list of FAQs? Please help us continue to address questions you would like to have answered or particular areas you'd like to see addressed by sending us your questions or feedback through the [Asbestos Comment Form](#).

WHAT HAPPENED?

Recent third party testing of cinder blocks slated for demolition in preparation for an upcoming remodeling project at the Justice Center (1777 6th Street, Boulder) discovered the presence of low levels of non-friable asbestos in coatings originally used as a sealer on the cinder blocks. Non-friable means the asbestos cannot be released into the air on its own; the block would need to be disturbed in some way (such as during a demolition project) in order for the asbestos-containing fibers to be released.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

Although a low-level asbestos-containing substance (3 percent chrysotile) was detected in the original block filler coating, due to the nature of the substance and because the block is overlaid with multiple coats of paint, the presence of the asbestos is not a health hazard when left undisturbed (i.e., as a block filler material encapsulated by paint, it does not produce an airborne form of asbestos). Air tests at the Justice Center were performed the weekend of Oct. 21, 2017, by an outside engineering firm after the asbestos-containing material was discovered. The air test results revealed that the indoor air quality at the Justice Center is within or below Colorado Maximum Allowable Asbestos Levels. This means the building is safe to occupy. [A copy of the test results](#) is available on the county [website](#).

WHY IS THERE A CONCERN?

This cinder block material is present throughout the Justice Center, where [past remodeling projects](#) had the potential to release the asbestos-containing substance into the air (i.e., make it friable) during construction. While we can't turn back the clock and test block materials that were removed as part of former construction projects, we are committed to undertaking additional testing and analysis of cinder blocks in other parts of the Justice Center to determine what, if any, potentially hazardous conditions may have existed in the past when construction projects were underway. We are also continuing to work with our consultants on an additional ventilation system test. Test results will be posted to the website as we receive them.

WHO IS AT RISK?

Members of the public visiting the Justice Center occasionally are at the lowest risk, while individuals who worked on construction projects that involved cinder blocks with this coating are at highest risk. The levels we encountered in our cinder block testing indicate that the likelihood of human health

impacts appears to be very low, as the block filler itself has a very low (3 percent chrysotile) asbestos content. According to the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, “Researchers still have not determined a ‘safe level’ of asbestos exposure but we do know that the higher the concentration of fibers and the longer the exposure, the greater the risk of contracting an asbestos-related disease.” Those diseases are serious – asbestosis, mesothelioma and lung cancer.

We expect that individuals who have spent time in the Justice Center will have concerns about their potential exposure to asbestos and may look to symptoms they’ve experienced to wonder about their risk of exposure. The only way to detect potential asbestos risk is to consult with a medical professional. “Despite the common misconception, exposure to asbestos fibers does not cause headaches, upper respiratory irritation or other immediate symptoms,” according to CDPHE. (See [Asbestos Fact Sheet](#) from CDPHE for other general information about asbestos.)

WHY DIDN’T WE KNOW ABOUT THIS FOR PAST PROJECTS?

Although we have tested and successfully mitigated other types of asbestos-containing materials such as tile, insulation, and roofing material at projects at the Justice Center and in other county-owned buildings for many years, the cinder block walls were never tested or identified as being suspect for containing asbestos material prior to this remodel. All prior testing was performed by certified asbestos inspectors, both on staff with the county and external experts. Different experts will sometimes identify different types of materials to test, using their best judgment.

WHAT SORTS OF REMODELING PROJECTS HAVE TAKEN PLACE AT THE JUSTICE CENTER?

Once the presence of the non-friable low-level asbestos-containing substance was detected in the original block filler coating (October 2017), Boulder County Building Services staff went back and examined all available files to recreate a [historical list of Justice Center remodeling projects](#).

WERE VENTILATION DUCTS REPLACED DURING AIR HANDLING REPLACEMENT PROJECTS?

As air handling equipment has been replaced with new equipment at various times at the Justice Center, there were sections of new ductwork installed to connect the new air handling units to the existing system. Sections of new ductwork have also been installed during various remodel projects throughout the building. The asbestos “tape tests” conducted by the contractor included both old and new sections of the air duct system, with a focus on capturing test samples from sections of both supply and return ductwork within the system for each air handling unit.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN NEXT?

The county will use outside experts to complete additional tests and release test results. We will put plans in place to ensure that all future projects involving coated cinder blocks are handled in a manner consistent with Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment requirements. We will also test cinder blocks in other locations at the Justice Center to determine what, if any, potentially hazardous conditions may have existed in past construction projects.

We are also continuing to work with our consultants on an additional ventilation system test. Test results will be posted to the website as we receive them. In addition, we will test cinder blocks in other locations at the Justice Center to determine what, if any, potentially hazardous conditions may have existed in past construction projects.

As we continue to work with the outside experts we have hired to advise us on asbestos-related matters, we will publish information to the website as soon as we know more. There are also some excellent reference materials on the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment website where you can learn more about asbestos. We will post information to the website as we receive it.

Meetings for JC staff (past and current), other employees, volunteers and users of the justice center, and other interested parties were held on Nov. 15 and 17 (2017) in the Jury Assembly Room at the Boulder County Justice Center.

WHAT SHOULD EMPLOYEES (PAST OR CURRENT) DO IF WE ARE CONCERNED ABOUT RISK OF PAST EXPOSURE?

Current or former employees working in the building who are concerned about human health impacts are encouraged to contact their Worker's Compensation providers or consult with a private physician.

Please remember that the county's Employee Assistance Program is available to all current county employees. If you are interested in seeking counseling or emotional support after learning this news, the internal EAP website ([InBC link](#)) has detailed information, or you can call 1-877-622-4327 to set up an appointment.

State employees can contact CSEAP (Colorado State Employee Assistance Program) at 1-800-821-8154 or 303-866-4314.