



October 15 — Don't Assume the Material is Safe

Walls not labeled for asbestos	Stopped work and found out if the walls were asbestos, they were
--------------------------------	--

Learning: Don't Assume the Material Is Safe

When work involves existing walls or other building materials, it may not always be obvious what is behind the surface or what the material contains. In this observation, the walls were **not labeled for asbestos**, creating uncertainty about what workers could encounter if work continued.

Instead of assuming the walls were safe to work on, the work was stopped and the condition was investigated. The investigation determined that the walls **did contain asbestos**. Stopping before disturbing the material prevented the crew from unknowingly continuing work on a material that required additional consideration.

This is an important example of **recognizing uncertainty as a reason to pause**. When information needed to safely perform a task is missing, don't fill in the blank with an assumption. Stop, ask questions, and find out what you are dealing with before proceeding.

Labels, documentation, and other information about existing materials are there to help us understand the work environment before we disturb it. If that information is missing, the safest choice is to **verify rather than assume**.

The observation also reinforces the value of Stop Work. The decision to pause the job created an opportunity to identify the material before the work continued.

Hazards

- Potential exposure to asbestos
- Disturbing unidentified building materials
- Missing or incomplete material identification
- Assuming an unknown material is safe
- Beginning work before confirming site conditions

Words of Wisdom

When you don't know what you're working with, don't guess. Stop, find the information you need, and make sure the material is understood before the work continues.

Pause and Think

- Do I know what materials I will be working around or disturbing?
- Is the material properly identified or labeled?
- What should I do when required information is missing?
- Am I making an assumption because I want to keep the job moving?
- What would cause me to stop and ask for additional information?

Closing Thought

Unknown doesn't mean safe. When something doesn't look right or the information isn't there, stop and find out before you disturb it.