



Health Concerns: Roofing Projects

Reroofing of University Buildings is a necessary part of building preservation. During the project roof tar odors are generated. The following information addresses some of the common complaints associated with roofing projects, and some methods for reducing can it result in chronic health problems?

These can be short term or acute effects of exposure to roof tar odors. They resolve within hours after exposure to the odor has stopped. Long term health effects are not expected for the levels found inside buildings during roofing projects.

I am pregnant, will the roof tar odors affect my baby?

There is indirect evidence that exposure to roof tar chemicals may cause birth defects. Laboratory studies of roof tar extracts have shown DNA changes in human fibroblasts and asphalt fume extracts. This may be a concern for asphalt workers because of their exposure to fumes, but not for building occupants with a much lower exposure.

Can breathing roof tar vapors cause cancer? What about skin contact?

There is no direct evidence that inhalation of roof tar odors causes cancer. Some epidemiological studies of asphalt workers suggest that they may be at increased risk for lung, stomach, and bladder cancer as well as leukemia. Other studies have been inconclusive. Skin contact with the roof tar has been shown to cause tumors in laboratory animals.

I have asthma, bronchitis and other lung problems. Can inhalation of roof tar odors aggravate my condition?

Yes, the roof tar odors can irritate the respiratory tract and aggravate the condition in people with asthma or other lung conditions. People with asthma should avoid breathing roof tar fumes.

Can hot roof tar produce hydrogen sulfide? Will it be at levels high enough to affect building occupants?

Yes, hydrogen sulfide can be produced from hot roof tar. The levels produced are usually not high enough to affect building occupants. Only levels inside an enclosed asphalt building are high enough to pose a serious health threat.

