

Gist Hall Closure: Frequently Asked Questions

Why is Gist Hall Closed?

During a routine check of the building's systems on Friday, May 10, the possible presence of disturbed asbestos was discovered. Under internal standard operating procedures, the air was shut off and closed to all faculty, staff, and students until the material could be removed. Through consultation with trained staff and outside contractors, the University determined a better course of action would be to investigate and address other areas for other potential disturbances prior to reopening the building.

Was I exposed to asbestos when I worked in Gist Hall?

Even though HSU is not legally obligated to do so, the air was tested in 18 different locations throughout the building. Tests all came back "No Structures Detected." This means asbestos fibers were not found in the air—even with the air system running. Therefore, based on the location of the materials and other factors, employees in Gist Hall were not exposed to disturbed asbestos.

However, it should also be noted that asbestos "exposure" is more specifically defined. For example, an unprotected person (meaning without a respirator) working directly with asbestos-containing materials can inhale up to approximately [3,000 fibers per minute](#) without being required by state and federal regulation to wear respiratory protection. Below this limit, which is called the "Permissible Exposure Limit" (PEL), it is believed the human body is capable of tolerating exposure through normal physiological processes. Most diseases related to asbestos are the result of chronic, very high industrial exposure (e.g., [shipyards, construction, and factories](#)) above this PEL.

Where was the asbestos located? Is there asbestos all over my workstation?

The asbestos was located in an air plenum—a space used to help circulate air—behind an access panel on the second floor of the building. After the material was discovered and tested, the rest of the attic area was searched for any additional material out of an abundance of caution. During this investigation, more materials were found. However, this material had been there before the air sampling and does not change the fact asbestos fibers were not detected in the air. Insulation and materials located close to the disturbed asbestos were not contaminated, which means the asbestos did not travel far from its location inside the attic.

The material in the plenum and attic has not been removed at this point and is contained to the area in which it was found. During the removal process, any disruption of the material will be cleaned up as specified by regulations and monitored by a third party to ensure the work is done properly. Additionally, the air throughout the building will be tested before the building reopens.

Why has the initial timeline been extended?

Gist Hall had been originally scheduled to reopen in June. That timeline and cleanup plan were based on the amount of material that was initially found. With the discovery of additional material in the attic, the scope of the cleanup will take longer than initially anticipated. Gist Hall is now expected to reopen in July. We are aware the extended timeline is disruptive and are working as quickly as possible to complete the cleanup before the fall semester begins.

Is there anything else I should know about asbestos?

Asbestos is a naturally occurring mineral found in many forms in our environment, including rocks, water, and soil. For instance, California's state rock, Serpentine, contains the Chrysotile form of asbestos. Low-levels of asbestos fibers from the natural breakdown of the mineral are commonly found in the indoor and outdoor air we breathe. These fibers can be found in the water we drink, as well. The EPA allows up to 7 million fibers of asbestos per liter of drinking water before it is considered a problem. Exposure to asbestos is only considered dangerous if it is in high quantities over extended periods of time.

If you have questions about any potential for exposure that might be deemed unsafe, please feel free to reach out to Human Resources x3626 so that they can help to address your specific concerns.