

# Swift Creek and Sumas River Flooding & Asbestos Fact Sheet



Swift Creek carries naturally occurring asbestos from deposits in landslide material on Sumas Mountain. Swift Creek joins the Sumas River near Nooksack before continuing north through Sumas into Canada. When Swift Creek and Sumas River flood, you may be exposed to asbestos in the water, or in mud and sediment left behind.

Microscopic asbestos fibers can cause damage to your lungs if they are inhaled over long periods of time. You can take steps to limit your exposure to asbestos from floodwaters.

## When Swift Creek or Sumas River flood:

- You should assume that floodwater, dirt, mud, and soil from Swift Creek and Sumas River contain asbestos. Asbestos fibers are too small to see.
- Take steps to limit your exposure to asbestos fibers in the air or floodwater. Use respiratory protection when you are in flooded areas or cleaning up after a flood.

## Respiratory protection:

- For non-work use only:
  - Wear a reusable half-face respirator with a P100 HEPA cartridge.
  - If this option is not available, certain disposable respirators may filter some asbestos from the air you breathe. They will not eliminate all asbestos fibers, and they can only be used once. Two types to consider are a NIOSH-approved N-95 3M 9210 or 3M 8211, which are available at hardware stores.
  - Disposable respirators are not approved by OSHA or NIOSH for work use.
- Do not use a dust mask or surgical masks and cloth face coverings that protect against COVID-19. These masks will not protect you from asbestos exposure.
- Use your respirator properly. Check out this tutorial from OSHA: <https://www.osha.gov/sites/default/files/publications/OSHA4015.pdf>

# After flooding:

## Protect yourself from mud and dirt that contain asbestos

- Wet down flood deposit material before you dig or move it. Dried sediments are more likely to release asbestos fibers into the air than wet sediments.
  - Use a hose to flush the material off of your driveway or walkway into an area where people will not be exposed to it.
  - Do not use fans to dry out the soil or sediments.
  - Do not sweep the material when it is dry. This can increase the release of asbestos fibers.
- Wear a disposable work suit (available in most hardware stores) or coveralls that can be taken off outside when cleaning up mud and sediment.
- Use respiratory protection (see above) when you spend time in areas affected by flooding or where material containing asbestos may be disturbed.
- Rinse your shoes after walking in areas with flood deposits.
- Remove your shoes prior to entering the house so that you do not track fibers into the home.
- Double bag any contaminated materials, such as work suits or gloves, before you dispose of them in the trash.
- Wash or vacuum your carpets or curtains using a vacuum with a high-efficiency HEPA filter.



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# Additional Resources

## Health Effects of Asbestos

- [https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/asbestos/health\\_effects\\_asbestos.html](https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/asbestos/health_effects_asbestos.html)
- <https://www.doh.wa.gov/CommunityandEnvironment/Contaminants/Asbestos>

## Sumas Mountain Asbestos Information

- <https://cumulis.epa.gov/supercpad/CurSites/csinfo.cfm?id=1002688>
- <https://ecology.wa.gov/S Pills-Cleanup/Contamination-cleanup/Sediment-cleanups/SwiftCreek>

## Ways to Control Naturally Occurring Asbestos Dust

- [www.arb.ca.gov/toxics/asbestos/3control.pdf](http://www.arb.ca.gov/toxics/asbestos/3control.pdf)

## Naturally-Occurring Asbestos around Your Home

- [www.arb.ca.gov/toxics/asbestos/4home.pdf](http://www.arb.ca.gov/toxics/asbestos/4home.pdf)

If you have additional questions, contact Jennifer Hayden, Environmental Health Supervisor, at 360-778-6036 or [jhayden@co.whatcom.wa.us](mailto:jhayden@co.whatcom.wa.us)