

Andrew F. Oberta, MPH, CIH
The Environmental Consultancy

Andy Oberta is an asbestos guru -- and a former rocket scientist -- who holds the unique combination of Aeronautical Engineering and Master of Public Health degrees. He is an internationally-recognized expert on asbestos control, a field in which he has specialized since 1980. In addition to consulting and training services, he provides expert witness services for litigation related to the management of asbestos-containing materials. His experience includes many unusual, challenging and confidential projects, a few examples of which are on the following pages.

Mr. Oberta is the instructor for the ASTM International (formerly American Society for Testing and Materials) Standards for Asbestos Control courses and is the author of the ASTM Manual on Asbestos Control: Surveys, Removal and Management -- Second Edition (2005), as well as the first edition published in 1995.

Mr. Oberta has nearly thirty years of professional experience as an environmental consultant, having provided services in air pollution and industrial hygiene as well as asbestos consulting. He is Certified in Comprehensive Practice by the American Board of Industrial Hygiene and is licensed as an Asbestos Consultant in Texas. Mr. Oberta is accredited according to EPA asbestos regulations as an Inspector, Management Planner and Project Designer for schools and for public, commercial and industrial buildings.

Mr. Oberta has served as President of the Environmental Information Association (the former National Asbestos Council), and also as an officer and director. He received the Jack Snider, Jr. Lifetime achievement award from EIA in 2006. He is Chairman of the ASTM Task Group on Asbestos Management, and is a member of ASTM committees on environmental assessment and on asbestos sampling and analysis. Mr. Oberta chaired the American Industrial Hygiene Association Asbestos subcommittee and was elected an AIHA Fellow in 2007.

Prior to entering the environmental field, Mr. Oberta worked in the aerospace industry on rocket propulsion and interplanetary spacecraft programs. His primary contributions were in the development of large solid rockets and in the fields of planetary quarantine and contamination control. Early in his career, he was a member of the American Rocket Society.

For information about Mr. Oberta's asbestos consulting services, contact him at:

The Environmental Consultancy
107 Route 620 South, Suite 102, M/S 35E
Austin, TX 78734
(512) 266-1368 / (800) 668-1368 (both lines voice and fax)
e-mail to info@asbestosguru-oberta.com

Detailed descriptions of the examples of his experience start on the next page

World Bank Asbestos Guidance Document....

The World Bank loans money to governments for infrastructure projects in developing countries where asbestos-containing materials are widely used. Working with a well-known international authority, I prepared major sections of a document titled "Asbestos: Occupational and Community Health Issues and Resources for Best Practice Standards" for the World Bank. This document will be used by World Bank procurement and field operations officers.

The sections and appendices that I prepared emphasized the use of the ASTM asbestos control standards for which I am responsible as the chairman of the Task Group on Asbestos Management. The World Bank Guidance Note recognizes these as the basis for an asbestos management program and also identifies other ASTM standards for asbestos sampling & analysis. One appendix identifies resources in the form of consensus standards and government regulations from the US and other countries, and another appendix provides guidance for working with asbestos-containing materials in existing structures. These considerations are particularly relevant in countries where the use of asbestos-cement products is prevalent.

Contaminated construction site...

A contractor excavated a roadway and deposited the material on a staging area for reclamation. The material included asbestos-cement water pipe that had been crushed in the process of excavation and transportation to the site. The pipe debris was mixed with dirt and pieces of concrete and the contractor initially desired to clean and salvage the larger pieces of concrete. I was initially asked to review a work plan for cleaning the concrete and verifying through analysis that the pieces were acceptably free of asbestos fibers. That approach was abandoned and the piles of dirt, concrete and embedded pipe were taken to a landfill and buried. The site remained contaminated with small pieces of pipe debris, however, when I visited the location and obtained debris and soil samples. I am currently reviewing a work plan for final clean-up of the site. Of particular significance is the presence of crocidolite in the pipe debris as determined by analysis and visually evident on close examination of the pieces that I collected. The soil clean-up, inspection and sampling methods will be of interest to those developing standards and regulations for similar activities.

University of Vermont asbestos management program...

I have been a consultant to the University of Vermont since 2002, when I conducted an in-depth audit of their asbestos management program. In 2005 I returned to the University for an additional review of their program and updated the results of the audit. During this visit I trained the Asbestos Program staff and consultants on the use of the ASTM asbestos control standards for which I am responsible. The Training and Compliance Office performs abatement with its own personnel, makes extensive uses of contractors and consultants, and has to comply with state asbestos regulations.

Currently I am assisting the Training and Compliance Office in the installation of the Customized Compliance Program for Asbestos for management of asbestos-containing materials in campus facilities. This work involves the importation of survey data from the extensive database maintained by TCO into the CCPA format, supported by collection and confirmation of survey data by TCO staff. I am responsible for creating the web pages that form the basic architecture of the CCPA and will be uploading them onto the UVM computers for access by campus users as well as TCO staff. When operational, the CCPA will provide information about the locations of asbestos-containing materials in campus buildings and precautions to avoid disturbing them, as well as satisfying communication requirements for staff and contractors. TCO will have access to enhanced risk assessment and budgeting tools for asbestos management through the CCPA.

Paper mill asbestos program audit....

A forest products concern retained me to audit the asbestos management program at one of their mills. A consultant had taken over 30,000 bulk samples of thermal system insulation since the mid-1990s and compiled the information in a database. Even with that amount of data, contractors were still encountering unidentified ACM fairly recently. My assignment was to analyze the database and recommend how its reliability could be improved and it could be used more efficiently. Over a four-month period that included a visit to the mill, I produced two reports that detailed quality control problems with the database, including mis-identification of samples and uncertainties in the identification of materials in multi-layer samples. I made recommendations for eliminating unnecessary information in the database and reorganizing the remainder as well as improving the way the information was displayed for the user. Suggestions were also made to improve the markings on pipes and tanks with which ACM was distinguished from non-ACM.

Asbestos mines in South Africa....

A colleague conducted field studies of contamination in communities near the asbestos mines and mills in four province of South Africa under a contract from the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism. I reviewed his study protocols and progress reports and also provided support for analysis of air, soil and building material samples by laboratories in the US. The exposure of residents in villages adjacent to the mines, where asbestos mills and disposal sites were also located, was evaluated on the basis of over 2,000 bulk samples collected by community activists trained for this study. A risk analysis model in the study report prioritizes remediation of the sites. Another study objective was to develop and validate a method of evaluating soil contamination by visual examination consistent with the limited analytical resources of South Africa and less-developed countries.

Asbestos consulting for Alcoa....

Since 1996 I have provided consulting services to Alcoa's Rockdale, TX Operations and to their corporate EHS staff. The Asbestos Survey document that I revised extensively for Rockdale was adopted at the corporate level and I contributed to the revision of other Alcoa asbestos management documents.

When Alcoa acquired the assets of Reynolds Aluminum, the Sherwin alumina refinery in Ingleside, TX was divested and the transaction required an estimate of asbestos abatement costs for the facility. I performed this study using the survey data provided by the plant's asbestos consultant and applied factors for condition and disturbance of the asbestos-containing materials on various components.

When Alcoa acquired the Howmet manufacturing plants in the US and Canada, I was asked to assist the corporate staff with bringing these plants into compliance with Alcoa's asbestos policies. I arranged to have the plants surveyed according to a specification and solicitations that I sent to asbestos consulting firms with offices near the plants. After the surveys were performed, I reviewed the reports and offered additional advice to the plant staff on interpreting the information. Besides my extensive experience in conducting asbestos surveys and preparing O&M plans, the most important factors in the success of this program were my personal contacts and reputation within the asbestos consulting community and my ability to manage a complex technical effort of this magnitude.

El Paso Electric consulting and training...

I have been a consultant to El Paso Electric since 2000. My initial assignment was to assist the Environmental Affairs Department in updating their asbestos management program and documentation, followed by asbestos awareness training for all employees in the powerplants, transmission and distribution, and others who might come in contact with asbestos-containing materials in the course of their work. During this time I advised the company on methods of reducing exposure during asbestos gasket cutting and removal operations.

In 2004 the company asked me to develop a procedure for inspecting cables in Transite ducts encased in buried concrete slabs when damage may occur during excavation by contractors. I have been training workers annually on this procedure and also providing respirator training and fit testing. One of the hands-on exercises is shown in the picture using a simulated slab and buried (non-asbestos) ducts). The procedure that the workers are trained on has been incorporated as an appendix in the ASTM E2394 Standard Practice for Maintenance, Renovation and Repair of Installed Asbestos Cement Products.

Asbestos abatement project...

A distributor of industrial and consumer products has two large warehouses in Austin, Texas. The asbestos surveys I conducted confirmed the presence of asbestos-containing fireproofing in a 20,000 ft² section of one of the warehouses. I prepared an abatement project design and assisted the building owner in soliciting proposals for abatement of the fireproofing. Because the fireproofing was on structural elements from fifteen to forty feet above the floor, safety was a paramount consideration.

I managed the abatement project as the owner's representative, providing oversight of the work done by the abatement contractor and a project monitoring firm. Preparation and removal involved elevated work on mobile man-lifts in large negative pressure enclosures. My specification required compliance with ASTM E1368, Standard Practice for Visual Inspection of Asbestos Abatement Projects, and the project monitoring firm operated an on-site laboratory for expeditious processing of final clearance air samples. The project was completed ahead of schedule and within the budgetary expectations of the client.

Consultant to General Services Administration...

The owner had purchased a 100,000 ft² building in which GSA had specified the installation of vinyl-asbestos floor tile and asbestos-containing ceiling tiles. The building had been leased to the VA and the owner sought to have GSA reimburse him for removing the floor tile and ceiling tiles. At the time of my inspection the floor tile and ceiling tiles had been removed but the asbestos-containing mastic remained. Using drawings, specifications and other contractual documents provided by GSA, I reconstructed the renovation history of the building to estimate when and where asbestos-containing materials were installed and removed over a 35-year period. At a hearing before a GSA Administrative Law Judge, I presented my findings and participated in discussions to establish the compensation agreed upon by GSA and the owner.

Technical support to U S Postal Service...

The Postal Service began developing a web-based asbestos management program for their facilities nationwide that was based on the Customized Compliance Program for Asbestos, a copyrighted product of Environment-i-media, Inc. I provided technical support to convert the browser-based features of the CCPA to a format compatible with the Oracle database software used by the Postal Service. The purpose of the Asbestos Module was to permit Facility Asbestos Coordinators and other Postal Service staff to enter, retrieve, display, share and analyze information on the location of asbestos-containing materials in the facilities, necessary precautions for employees and contractors and posting of signs and labels. It would also have provided a means of issuing notices to employees and contractors as required by OSHA regulations for asbestos-related work. The Module would have incorporated the feature of the CCPA that assesses the Current Condition and Potential for Disturbance of asbestos-containing materials as defined in ASTM E2356 Standard Practice for Comprehensive Building Asbestos Surveys. It also would have used a method of calculating abatement costs that is unique to the CCPA. Like the CCPA, the Module made extensive use of photos and graphics for presenting the information to the user.

Asbestos contamination in Northern Israel...

From 1952 to 1997, a plant in northern Israel manufactured asbestos-cement pipe and sheet products, using chrysotile, crocidolite and amosite asbestos fiber. Worker exposure to these fibers has resulted in high rates of asbestos-related diseases. The waste material from the manufacturing process is both friable and non-friable, and was disposed of in a manner that contaminated property inside and outside the plant boundaries, as well as residential areas in the community.

I served as a consultant to the Ministry of the Environment on this problem and spent two weeks in Israel inspecting the affected areas and meeting with the parties involved. Specific aspects of the problem include construction of an amusement park on contaminated land, clean-up of an adjacent contaminated beach, and the use of these areas for recreational purposes.

Subsequent to my visit, construction was stopped on the amusement park and never resumed. One of my recommendations was implemented that public access to the beach and roadway through the site be prohibited. Contaminated soil was removed from along the plant property fence line and a plastic membrane laid down and covered with clean soil. The production equipment was removed from the plant and the remaining product and waste material disposed of in a landfill.

Work practices for non-friable materials...

There are numerous types of non-friable asbestos-containing materials in postal facilities, including vinyl asbestos tile, asbestos asphalt plank and asbestos-cement (Transite) panels. I conducted a two-day course for the Postal Service that covered the fundamentals of asbestos awareness and respiratory protection, described seven drilling and repair procedures and included hands-on exercises where all attendees practiced the procedures on non-asbestos materials. The procedures have been shown to keep worker exposure well below the OSHA Permissible Exposure Limits by using wet methods without the need for HEPA-filtered vacuum cleaners.

These materials are also prevalent in telecommunications facilities and in customer's buildings including residential structures where equipment must be installed and removed. I have conducted classes of shorter duration for the telecommunications industry using the same methods as for the Postal Service. I have also presented these methods at conferences for flooring contractors and the utility industry.

EPA criminal case....

As a consultant to the EPA Criminal Investigation Division, I inspected the location of an alleged illegal asbestos removal from a large steam-heated water tank. Under the watchful eye of the defense attorney and expert, I directed the collection of residue from the tank surface by an EPA technician. This residue was analyzed by an EPA laboratory and found to contain asbestos. I received the samples as evidence and examined their physical characteristics, then returned them to EPA under chain of custody. During the investigation I also examined other samples and associated them with the tank through their physical characteristics, as well as reviewing documents and attending conferences with EPA attorneys and agents.

Court-appointed expert...

By mutual agreement of plaintiff's and defense counsel, I served as an expert for the Special Master in a case where W R Grace was proposing to use their DMA asbestos digestion process as the basis for determining abatement costs in cost recovery litigation for two airport complexes. I reviewed an extensive amount of documentation on the development of the process, the economics of its application, and the results of its testing at a WR Grace research facility for exposure to asbestos fibers and the chemical constituents of the DMA agent. I visited the research facility with experts for defense and plaintiffs to observe the application of the agent to Monokote fireproofing on beams and the deck, wearing the protective chemical suit required at that stage of development. As part of my effort I toured parts of both airport terminals and support buildings to observe the locations where Monokote had been installed. From this assignment I gained an early and thorough knowledge of the principles and limitations of the DMA process and similar asbestos conversion methods.

Summaries of other cases Mr. Oberta has worked on are available to interested attorneys on request.