OTTAWA INSULATION CONTRACTORS

Old Insulation & Safety

Vermiculite, UFFI and old insulation: Health Canada's advice, testing first, and when removal becomes abatement work

4 Expert Answers from R-Value IQ

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Q1

When was UFFI banned, according to Health Canada, for Ottawa owners?

Health Canada says urea formaldehyde foam insulation (UFFI) has been prohibited from advertising, sale or importation into Canada under the Hazardous Products Act since December 1980. The prohibition covers all urea formaldehyde-based thermal insulation foamed in place to insulate buildings, including melamine urea and other urea formaldehyde resins. Natural Resources Canada's insulation guide lists the same: UFFI foamed in place, prohibited in Canada in 1980.

That date applies across Canada, including Ottawa, and Health Canada keeps the notice on an archived page. Health Canada describes UFFI as widely used in the 1970s for insulating and retrofitting older residential buildings, and as a low-density foam with the appearance and consistency of shaving cream that stiffens as it cures.

On health, Health Canada says the urea formaldehyde resin can release formaldehyde gas during curing and afterwards, that it has concerns about the health of people exposed to formaldehyde, and that formaldehyde emissions decrease over time. We do not go beyond those lines for any particular house, and nothing here says whether your walls contain it.

If you are planning work that opens or adds insulation to older walls, ask the contractor how they will identify what is already in the wall before they start, and get that step written into the quote. Ontario's Building Code permits loose-fill insulation in the wood-frame walls of existing buildings (9.25.2.4.(3)), and its note warns that adding insulation to existing wood-frame walls increases the likelihood of moisture damage to framing and cladding, so ask how the siding, flashing and caulking will be checked first.

Q2

Does old wet attic insulation need removing in an Ottawa house?

Wet attic insulation does not always have to come out, but whether it stays or goes depends on what a contractor finds when they look at it. We found no Code rule that requires removing wet insulation from an existing attic as a standalone step.

What matters is the condition of the material and the sheathing beneath it. A contractor needs to check whether the insulation has dried out and still holds its shape and R-value, or whether it has compacted, grown mould, or left the sheathing stained or soft. Those are site findings, not something to judge from a description. Ask where the moisture came from before new insulation goes in.

If removal is needed, published 2025-2026 estimates for removing clean old insulation run about $0.75 to $2.00 per square foot of attic floor. Work involving mould or contaminated material falls outside that range, and we found no published price with two independent sources for that scope.

One thing to raise before any attic work in an older Ottawa house: if the existing insulation may be vermiculite, Health Canada says to assume vermiculite produced before 1990 may contain some asbestos and not to disturb it yourself. Testing and removal of that material belong to a qualified specialist. For that, ottawaabatement.com covers asbestos testing and removal.

A few things worth asking any contractor who quotes this job:

- What exactly did you find, and where is the moisture coming from?
- Is the roof sheathing sound, or does it need attention before new insulation goes in?
- What material are you proposing for the replacement, and what R-value will the finished attic reach?
- Will you check and preserve the soffit venting so air can still move freely under the sheathing?
- Is there any old insulation that needs to be identified before work starts?

Before work begins, get the full scope in writing: what is being removed, what is going in, the area in square feet, the finished R-value, the price, and the start and completion dates. That written contract is what protects you if the job changes partway through.

Q3

Can I remove vermiculite from my Westboro attic myself?

Health Canada's advice is direct: do not attempt to remove vermiculite yourself, and do not disturb it.

The reason Health Canada gives is this: it is prudent, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, to assume that vermiculite insulation produced before 1990 may contain some asbestos. Not all of it does, but without testing you cannot know. Health Canada says there is no evidence of a risk to health if the insulation remains sealed in an attic and kept from exposure. The risk comes from disturbing it.

What Health Canada advises for your situation:

- Do not go into the attic to disturb or remove the material yourself.
- Do not use the attic for storage, and keep children out.
- Hire a professional to test for asbestos before any renovation work touches that space.
- If asbestos is found, hire a qualified asbestos removal specialist to do the removal.

Testing and removal are the work of an abatement contractor, not an insulation contractor. That work falls outside what this site covers. For testing and removal in Westboro, ottawaabatement.com is the right starting point. Health Canada's page on asbestos also lists steps for a home with vermiculite in the attic or walls: apply caulking to seal openings or gaps around the attic hatch, baseboards, light fixtures, electrical outlets, and window and door frames, and repair any cracks or holes in the walls and ceilings.

If you are planning to add new insulation on top of or near the vermiculite, the same advice applies: Health Canada says to have a professional test for asbestos before renovating.

Book the test before you ask anyone to quote the insulation work.

Q4

Who tests attic insulation for asbestos before work in Ottawa?

Asbestos testing in an attic belongs to a separate trade from insulation work. Health Canada advises hiring a professional to test for asbestos before any renovation that might disturb old insulation, and if asbestos is found, hiring a qualified asbestos removal specialist. That work is covered at ottawaabatement.com.

The reason this matters before attic insulation work is straightforward. Vermiculite insulation produced before 1990 may contain asbestos, in Health Canada's words. Health Canada says it is prudent, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, to assume that vermiculite produced before 1990 may contain some. It also says there is no evidence of a risk to health if the insulation remains sealed and isolated in an attic, and that you should not disturb it or attempt to remove it yourself. An insulation contractor is not the right person to make the call on whether the material is safe to work around; a professional who tests for asbestos is.

The sequence matters. Testing comes first, before any insulation contractor enters the attic space. If a professional finds asbestos, Health Canada says to hire a qualified asbestos removal specialist to remove it.

Health Canada also notes that not all vermiculite produced before 1990 contains asbestos, which is why the test comes first. Until then, its advice for an attic with vermiculite is not to use the attic for storage, to keep children out of it, and not to disturb the insulation.

When it is time to price the insulation work, compare written quotes on the material named, the square footage and the finished depth and R-value.

Disclaimer: This guide is provided for informational purposes only by Ottawa Insulation Contractors. It does not constitute professional advice. Always consult qualified contractors and your local building authority (the City of Ottawa) before starting any insulation project. Insulation on its own is not named on the City's permit lists, but work that comes with it can need a permit, so ask the City first. Information is current as of November 15, 2026 and may change. Visit **ottawainsulationcontractors.ca** for the latest answers.