



Report Master
Inspections

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Information Sheet

Asbestos

Asbestos is a material made from fibrous silicate minerals found in some rock formations. When it is disturbed, it produces a dust that contains asbestos fibres. Fibres breathed into the lungs can cause a range of health problems.

When asbestos fibres are bonded to another material, such as cement or resin binder, it is known as bonded asbestos. It cannot be crumbled, pulverised or reduced to a powder by hand pressure when dry. Common uses in buildings include flat (fibro), corrugated or compressed asbestos-cement (AC) sheeting.

Asbestos was widely used in building materials from the 1940's to the late 1980's because of its durability, fire resistance and insulating properties.



Corrugated roofing materials



Fibro Cladding



Fibro clad house

Because exposure to asbestos fibres can cause disease, the majority of building products containing asbestos were phased out in the late 1980's and a national ban on the manufacture, importation and installation of products containing asbestos was introduced from 1 January 2004.

If the property you live in or are considering purchasing was constructed prior to 1989 it is quite likely to have building materials that contain asbestos. This is the case with nearly all homes built in this period.

Generally, the presence of asbestos in home building materials does not pose a health risk unless the material is broken, deteriorating or disturbed in such a way that the dust containing asbestos fibres is produced such as during sanding or sawing. If asbestos materials are damaged and dust or fibres are produced, inhalation of the dust can be hazardous.

Studies have shown that the asbestos building product used most commonly in the home, asbestos cement or fibre sheeting, is not a significant health risk if left undisturbed and maintained in good condition.

Asbestos building products were commonly used and include the following – (please note that this list is not exhaustive).

Eaves lining	Roof cladding	Electrical switchboard
External doors	External wall cladding	Wet area walls
Wet area ceilings	Corrugated roofing materials	Internal fire doors
Roof cladding	Oven door seals	Wall cladding
Artificial brick cladding	Flue pipes	Vinyl floor tiles or coverings

It is difficult to tell whether a building material contains asbestos. The only way to be certain is to have a sample of the material tested in an accredited laboratory. It cannot be identified by sight.

Loose asbestos was rarely used in domestic situations however; it is possible that (in some old homes) loose or knitted asbestos fibres may also have been used as;

- Insulation on hot water pipes
- Insulation in old domestic heaters
- Insulation in some stoves
- Ceiling insulation products (very rare in domestic situations).

A householder can legally remove asbestos from their property in some states but you should check with your local State Workcover or WorkSafe organisation. It is recommended that a licensed professional be consulted and engaged to remove asbestos materials.

Strict precautions apply to the removal and disposal of asbestos and asbestos-containing materials. You should check with your local regulators however; below is some basic guidelines.

- Wear a disposable overall, hat and gloves
- Work in a well ventilated area
- Wear a disposable particulate respirator fitted with an appropriate cartridge
- Lay plastic drop sheets around the area to catch any debris
- Wet the asbestos surface to reduce the risk of dust particles floating into the air
- Carefully pull out any nails
- Do not use power tools to saw, grind, drill or break any asbestos product
- Try not to break sheets as you remove them
- Place asbestos sheets on the ground rather than dropping them
- If you need to sweep, use a wet mop instead
- Vacuum the area with a vacuum cleaner designed for asbestos fibre collection
- After finishing work, place your clothes in a container marked 'asbestos contaminated clothing' and dispose with other contaminated materials. Leave the respirator on until contaminated clothing is bagged and sealed
- After you have finished, wash your hands and shower

To dispose of asbestos materials, contact the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for advice.

Asbestos: Frequently asked questions

What is asbestos?

Asbestos is the name given to a group of naturally occurring mineral fibres which were used extensively in many products owing mainly to the strength and insulating features of the fibres and their resistance to fire and erosion.

How do I know if a material contains asbestos?

Generally, it is not possible to determine whether a material contains asbestos simply by looking at it. The only way to be sure it contains asbestos is to get a sample analysed by a NATA (National Association of Testing Authorities, Australia) accredited laboratory.

What are the health effects caused by exposure to asbestos cement products?

Asbestos cement sheeting (and other bonded type asbestos products) does not pose a health risk as long as the products are in good condition, well maintained and not disturbed or damaged. If the products become damaged however, asbestos fibres may become airborne.

How do I remove and dispose of asbestos?

It is generally advised to employ a licensed contractor to remove asbestos products from your home however, you can do it yourself. Refer to recommendations made earlier in the fact sheet and always contact your local authorities for the most up to date information.

Do I have to remove asbestos products from within my home?

No. If you have asbestos products in your home that are in good condition, and are well maintained and are not damaged or decomposing, there is no need to remove these products from your house. If vinyl floor tiles become worn through, internal walls become damaged etc, it is advised to have these products removed from your home responsibly to reduce the potential for asbestos exposure.

Where do I go to get a licensed asbestos removalist?

For appropriately licensed removalists, see 'Asbestos Removal &/or Treatment' in the Yellow Pages.

Where can I dispose of asbestos waste?

For a list of approved asbestos disposal sites, contact the EPA.

Do I need to get approval before removing asbestos from my house?

Check with your Local Council about approvals for building, renovation and demolition.

I have an asbestos fence, how do I go about getting it removed?

Fencing issues come under the Fences Act which is administered by your Local Council.

There is a building nearby having asbestos removed. Should I have been told this was happening?

Although licensed contractors are advised to inform immediate neighbours of a planned asbestos removal in writing, it is not a regulation.

What should I do if a neighbour has asbestos removed from their house?

It is advised that you keep your doors and windows shut and don't hang clothes on the clothes line during the period of the asbestos removal and subsequent clean up.

I am worried asbestos dust may have entered my rain water tank. What should I do?

Don't worry. Asbestos has only been shown to cause health effects if the fibres are inhaled. Asbestos is a naturally occurring mineral and there are background levels present in rainwater anyway.

For further information and advice regarding asbestos, please contact either of the following;

- Your Local Council
- Your Local Health department
- Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)