

Management and disposal of asbestos

This Safety Alert highlights the importance of safe asbestos management and disposal in Victoria.

June 2013

Background

Recent reports in Victoria and throughout Australia have highlighted the importance of safely managing and disposing of asbestos.

Asbestos is the name given to various forms of naturally occurring fibrous silicate minerals. It can be either friable or non-friable.

When it's dry, **friable** asbestos can be crumbled, pulverised or reduced to powder by hand pressure. This might include previously non-friable asbestos that has deteriorated.

Non-friable asbestos is usually bonded or mixed with cement or a similar material. It can not be crumbled, pulverised or reduced to powder by hand pressure.

Asbestos was used in a wide range of building products and materials up until the mid-1980s (because of its strength, durability and resistance to fire and water). Products that may contain asbestos include cement roof sheeting and wall lining, vinyl floor tiles lagging and jointing material and fire blankets.

The import, manufacture, supply, sale and use or re-use of asbestos and asbestos-containing products has been banned in Australia since the end of 2003. Asbestos installed before this date (eg in residential or commercial buildings) can be left as it is if it is not damaged and in good condition but can not be re-used.

The health risk of asbestos

Asbestos poses a health risk only when asbestos fibres are released into the air that people breathe. Asbestos is not considered a significant health risk as long as it is in good condition and remains undamaged and undisturbed.

Asbestos can cause health problems when fibres become airborne and are inhaled. Once inside the lungs, most asbestos fibres are removed by the body's natural defences however some fibres can become trapped in the lungs. In some individuals, this can result in serious lung diseases such as asbestosis, lung cancer or mesothelioma that may develop years later (typically a 10 to 40 year latency period).

Not everyone exposed to asbestos fibres will contract

an asbestos-related disease. In fact, the chances are low with a single exposure. The risk increases with the number of exposures and with higher concentrations of fibres.

Which agency should you contact if you find asbestos?

The government agencies in Victoria that provide assistance with asbestos are:

- Identification, management, handling and removal of asbestos in a **workplace** is regulated by [WorkSafe Victoria](http://worksafe.vic.gov.au) (worksafe.vic.gov.au).
- If you are a **householder** and have concerns with asbestos in your home, refer to [Asbestos: A guide for householders and the general public](#), or contact your [local council environmental health officer](#) or the [Department of Health](http://health.vic.gov.au/environment) (health.vic.gov.au/environment) for advice.
- If you are involved in the **disposal** or transportation of waste asbestos, please contact [EPA Victoria](http://epa.vic.gov.au) (epa.vic.gov.au).

Licensed asbestos removalists - workplaces

In most cases, asbestos removal from a **workplace** must be done by a removalist licensed by WorkSafe or trained employees of a licence-holder.

Class B licence-holders are only permitted to remove non-friable asbestos such as asbestos cement sheet, eaves or pipe; and must comply with a number of requirements. These include:

- appointing a supervisor to oversee work
- using specific methods for removal
- waste containment and waste disposal
- using signs and barricades
- wearing appropriate personal protective equipment.

Class A licence-holders are permitted to remove higher-risk friable as well as non-friable asbestos.

They must comply with the same requirements outlined above for Class B licence holders, but must also implement a range of specific measures to carry out the work safely and control the risk, including:

- using enclosures for friable asbestos removal work
- always having the nominated supervisor on site.

In addition, non-friable asbestos in amounts greater than 10 square metres and friable asbestos in any amounts require an independent competent person (with sufficient knowledge, skills and experience) to be engaged to do a visual inspection, and issue a clearance certificate before the area is re-occupied.

Removing asbestos without a licence: In very limited circumstances at workplaces, some asbestos may be removed without a licence if done so safely and in accordance with the law. This is possible if the asbestos is non-friable, the area of asbestos-containing material does not exceed 10 square metres in total, and the total time spent by the employer on any removal work (including their employees) is less than one hour over the space of any seven days.

Further information:

WorkSafe publications

[More Information about Asbestos](#)

[Managing domestic non-friable Asbestos](#)

Compliance Codes

[Managing asbestos in workplaces](#)

[Removing asbestos in workplaces](#)

Contact Details

Call us on: **1800 136 089**

Email us at: info@worksafe.vic.gov.au

For more information on occupational health and safety, go to WorkSafe's website: worksafe.vic.gov.au

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