



Government
of South Australia

SafeWork SA

ASBESTOS AND THE HOME RENOVATOR

A basic guide on what you need
to know about asbestos



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DISCLAIMER

This publication contains information regarding occupational health and safety. It includes some of your obligations under the Occupational Health and Safety legislation that SafeWork SA administers. To ensure you comply with your legal obligations you must refer to the appropriate Acts and Regulations.

This publication may refer to legislation that has been amended or repealed. When reading this publication you should always refer to the latest laws.

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DOES YOUR HOUSE CONTAIN ASBESTOS?

The most accurate way to find out if your house contains asbestos cement products or any other asbestos-containing material is for competent people to inspect and test it. You can't tell by looking at it!

SafeWork SA can provide you with the names of organisations that can perform these tests and inspections. *See the 'Help and advice' section at the end of this publication for contact numbers, or check the 'Yellow Pages' under asbestos.*

Only asbestos cement products made before the mid to late 1980s contain asbestos. Other asbestos-containing products made before the 1980s may also be found in the home. These include water drainage and flue pipes, roofing shingles, guttering, vinyl tiles and the underlay to vinyl sheet floors. It is always best to have suspect products tested to be sure of their contents. Since 31 December 2003, the use of all forms of asbestos has been banned nationally (with only a few very specific exemptions).

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

Breathing in asbestos fibres can cause asbestosis, lung cancer and mesothelioma. However, this does not automatically mean that your health is at risk if you find that your home or workplace contains materials made from asbestos.

Studies show that these products, if left undisturbed, may not present a significant health risk provided the material is in reasonable condition. If the asbestos fibres remain firmly bound in a solid matrix, generally you do not need to remove the asbestos-containing product. Even weathered asbestos roofing may not release many airborne fibres unless the material is disturbed or handled in a way that promotes the release of fibres.

Health problems usually occur when people are unaware of the hazards of working with asbestos-containing products. The important point is to always work so there is minimal release of dust or small particles from the asbestos-containing material. Asbestos becomes a health risk when large amounts of asbestos fibres are released into the air and inhaled. If you use commonsense and follow safety guidelines, living with asbestos-containing products should not be a problem.

SAFE WORK PROCEDURES

Removing asbestos is a specialised task. The Asbestos Regulations apply to workplaces. A licensed asbestos removal contractor must carry out any asbestos removal at a worksite if the amount is greater than $\frac{1}{2}\text{m}^2$ or more of friable asbestos or 10m^2 or more of non-friable asbestos.

Although you do not need a licence to remove asbestos in your home as a homeowner, it is strongly recommended that you contract a licensed asbestos removal contractor if you are planning asbestos removal work. If you are undertaking maintenance or minor asbestos removal work, it is important to apply the safety control measures outlined below to ensure you minimise exposure to asbestos fibres.

It is also recommended that a fully licensed asbestos contractor removes the asbestos-containing underlay to vinyl sheet floors, as the asbestos is in a friable form and this presents a greater risk of asbestos fibre exposure. (Specialist equipment may be required for this type of work and licensed asbestos removal contractors will have the right equipment to do the work.)

Note: Friable asbestos: Any material that contains asbestos and is in the form of a powder or can be pulverized or reduced to powder by hand pressure when dry.

Non-friable asbestos: Any material that contains asbestos in a bonded matrix. It may consist of cement or resin/binders and cannot be crushed by hand when dry.

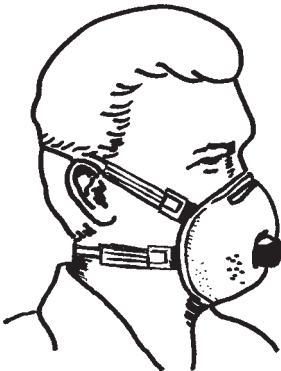


SAFETY CONTROL MEASURES

Read the following safety checklist before you start working:

- **Let people know.** Talk it over with those who may be affected by the asbestos removal and disposal, for example, your neighbours.
 - **Wear protective equipment.** You should wear **disposable coveralls*** and a **P1* or P2* disposable dust respirator (Australian Standards Approved)** if you are working with asbestos cement products. Ensure that you follow the instructions on the packet on how to wear the respirator correctly.
- * *Your hardware store can supply all of the materials and equipment you will need.*

EXAMPLES OF APPROPRIATE RESPIRATORS:



DISPOSABLE, HALF-FACE PARTICULATE RESPIRATORS



HALF-FACE PARTICULATE FILTER (CARTRIDGE) RESPIRATOR

- **Do not use power tools.** Asbestos fibres can be released if power tools are used for anything other than the removal of screws and bolts. Non-powered tools should be used instead as they generate less dust. Keeping the area wet minimises the release of fibres.
- **Do not waterblast or scrub with a stiff broom.** It is illegal to waterblast asbestos cement products and doing so will produce high levels of asbestos fibres. If the material has suddenly deteriorated in some way, it is advisable to have it assessed by a competent person.
- **Wet gently with water if you need to.** If you need to prepare a surface for painting, gently remove any loose paint with a paint scraper, keeping the surface wet to minimise the release of fibres by wet wiping with a moist cloth. You could use sugar soap to clean the surface.

Remember, do not waterblast asbestos cement products and be careful when on a roof as asbestos sheets can be brittle and slippery when wet. It is also very important that you treat any waste created during the preparation of the surface as if it is contaminated with asbestos.

- **Avoid drilling around the roof area.** Do not drill holes through eaves, flues or vents. Never cut into an asbestos cement sheet. If an occasional hole is required, use a non-powered drill, wear appropriate protective equipment and keep the area wet. If significant work is required, it is advisable to remove the entire sheet and replace it with a non-asbestos product.
- **Do not drop asbestos cement sheets.** Remove asbestos cement sheets carefully. Make sure you lower them carefully to the ground. Do not drop them.

CLEANING UP

- **Stack and wrap.** Stack asbestos cement sheets carefully on the ground. Place all asbestos cement waste in thick **plastic bags (200 micron)*** or wrap in **plastic sheets (200 micron)*** for disposal. Alternatively, you may place the waste into hired skips or bins that have been prelined with plastic sheeting (200 microns) (see 'Safe disposal') and ensure the waste is kept wet to minimise the release of fibres.
 - **No skidding.** When stacking asbestos cement sheets, do not skid one sheet over another as this can release asbestos fibres.
 - **Remove immediately.** Do not leave asbestos cement product waste lying about where it may be further broken or crushed by people or traffic. Remove all asbestos waste as soon as possible to the nearest approved disposal site.
 - **Clean up everything.** Put used disposable coveralls and masks in bags for removal with other asbestos waste. Wet wipe any tools used during the work (treat the cleaning cloth as asbestos-contaminated). Any dust created during the work can also be wet wiped.
- * *Your hardware store can supply all of the materials and equipment you will need.*

SAFE DISPOSAL

Dispose of all asbestos waste promptly. For safety always:

- **Wet all asbestos waste** and place in thick **plastic bags (200 micron)***, wrap in **plastic sheets (200 micron)*** or place directly in plastic-lined bins or vehicles. Tape and label: **'CAUTION: ASBESTOS, DO NOT INHALE DUST'**.

It is illegal to put asbestos waste in domestic garbage bins and compactors. Remove all asbestos waste as soon as possible.

- **Dispose of asbestos waste** at a site approved by your local council or the Environment Protection Authority (EPA). Asbestos can only be dumped at approved disposal sites. The EPA can advise you of the location of these sites. See *'Help and advice'* for contact numbers.



OTHER THINGS TO KEEP YOUR EYE ON

- **Watch for environmental damage.** Regularly inspect the condition of asbestos roofs and other sheeting to ensure they have not been damaged. Badly weathered or damaged sheets may need to be replaced.
- **Keep guttering and downpipes in good repair.** As asbestos fibres may collect in gutters after heavy rain, guttering and downpipes should be in good repair on buildings with asbestos roofing. Wet roof gutters before removing them and wrap them carefully.
- **What about insulation?** Insulation materials in house roof spaces are usually fiberglass, rockwool, cellulose or foam. Very few houses in South Australia contain loose asbestos insulation in the roof space. However, if you are unsure about this you should have it inspected by a competent person.
- **Fire damage.** Fire-damaged property containing asbestos products could create loose asbestos fibres due to intense heat. A licensed asbestos contractor should be used for cleaning up the damaged areas.

SHOULD I COAT EXTERNAL ASBESTOS CEMENT PRODUCTS?

Coating weathered asbestos cement products is not recommended. If the product is in poor condition it should be removed and replaced. Remember:

- **To check if your asbestos roofing (like all roofing) needs to be replaced.** Roofing that has weathered to the point where it is structurally unsound and no longer waterproof should be replaced. Due to the brittle and fragile nature of asbestos roofing, it is extremely dangerous to access the roof and it is recommended that you use a licensed asbestos removal contractor.
- **If you do need to access the roof**, as mentioned above, due to the brittle and fragile nature of asbestos roofing, it is extremely dangerous to access it. Therefore, you must put planks down so that people do not have to walk directly on the roof. Alternatively you could consult with an experienced and competent person.
- **Wear an appropriate protective respirator and disposable coveralls** when working with asbestos cement products.
- **If you must waterproof any asbestos cement products**, it is recommended that you take all necessary precautions as outlined in the *Code of Practice for Asbestos Work*.

HELP AND ADVICE

RESOURCES

The following resources provide more detailed information on the safe removal of asbestos products:

- *The Occupational Health, Safety and Welfare Regulations 1995* – Division 4.2
- *Approved Code of Practice for the Safe Removal of Asbestos*
- SafeWork SA's *Asbestos and the Home Mechanic* publication
- SafeWork SA's Website: www.safework.sa.gov.au

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

For more information about working with asbestos cement products and preventing exposure, contact:

SafeWork SA's Mineral Fibres Unit

Telephone: (08) 8303 0405

Principal Inspector - Mineral Fibres, SafeWork SA

Telephone: (08) 8303 9921

Chief Advisor - Occupational Hygiene, SafeWork SA

Telephone: (08) 8303 0207

Environmental Health Service, Department of Health

Telephone: (08) 8226 7100

The Environmental Health Officer (EHO) at your local council

For advice on the disposal of asbestos products in South Australia, contact:

Environment Protection Authority (EPA)

Telephone: (08) 8204 2000

OTHER USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

Asbestos Victims Association (SA) Inc.

Telephone: (08) 8331 0254 or Freecall 1800 665 395

Asbestos Disease Society of SA Inc.

Telephone: (08) 8359 2423 or Freecall 1800 157 540

