

Asbestos Factsheet

What is Asbestos

Asbestos is a naturally occurring mineral found in the ground. It contains strong fibres that have excellent durability, fire resistance and insulation properties. Because of these properties, asbestos was manufactured into many different materials, commonly used in the Australian building industry between the 1940s and late 1980s. At the time, the health risks associated with asbestos were not known. Airborne asbestos fibres were extremely hazardous to health and as such, it is against the law not to control the risk in homes and workplaces.

Friable Asbestos

Asbestos containing material that can be easily reduced to powder when crushed by hand when dry. Friable asbestos has a much greater risk to health as the fibres can easily become airborne if damaged. Examples of friable asbestos-containing materials includes: some sprayed on fire retardants, sound proofing and insulation, the lining on some old domestic heaters, stoves and hot water systems, and pipe insulation, the backing of sheet vinyl and linoleum floor coverings, thermal insulation.

Non-friable (also known as bonded)

Asbestos containing materials in which the asbestos is firmly bonded with other materials are known as non-friable asbestos. These materials can still be friable asbestos if broken or damaged. Examples included: asbestos cement products, plaster patching compounds, compounds, textured paint, vinyl floor covering.

Naturally occurring asbestos

Asbestos may exist in its natural state in soil and rock formations; you may come across this type in road building, site and construction work, other excavation activities and in the mining industry. There are many locations where there is naturally occurring asbestos. Geographical survey information should be checked when working in these areas.

Health Risk

Being around asbestos materials does not necessarily create a health risk, as long as there is no damage to the materials – it is only when particles become airborne and are inhaled that you should be concerned. Activities such as cutting asbestos materials with power tools and cleaning fibro roof (containing asbestos) are prohibited as it is difficult to contain the asbestos fibres. Asbestos fibres are around 50 to 200 times thinner than a human hair, can be invisible and breathed in easily. Breathing in asbestos fibres has been linked to the following health effects:

- Asbestosis (progressive and irreversible scarring of lung tissue that impairs breathing)
- Lung cancer
- Mesothelioma: It is the cancer of the lining around the lungs and abdomen
- Non-cancerous diseases that affect the linings around the lungs and abdomen (commonly called 'benign pleural cures')

How to Handle, remove and dispose of asbestos

Minor works such as drilling in asbestos sheeting; painting or removing wall paper related to Non-friable asbestos can be handled safely, if you use the right procedures. To find out how to do the work safely, read Asbestos: a guide for minor renovation at:

<http://www.deir.qld.gov.au/asbestos/resources/pdfs/asbestos-home-renovators-trades-guide.pdf>

Prohibited activities:

Some activities are prohibited as it is difficult to contain the asbestos fibres released. These activities include:

- Cutting asbestos materials with a power tool, such as an angle grinder, circular saw or electric sander.
- Cleaning asbestos materials, such as a roof sheeting, with as high-pressure water cleaner.
- Using compresses air or abrasive-blasting materials.

Removal of non-friable asbestos

If you are renovating or removing asbestos from your home, it is strongly recommended that you engage a licenced asbestos removal contractor or reduce potential exposure to yourself, your family and neighbours. If removing more than 10 square meters of non-friable (bonded) asbestos, you will require a certificate.

Removal of friable asbestos

Only holder of an "A" class licence can remove friable asbestos (e.g. felt carpet underlay).

Disposal of asbestos

Asbestos is a regulated waste and cannot be disposed of in rubbish bins, recycling bins or at Council's transfer stations. Not all landfills can accept asbestos waste. Please contact Councils Waste Management department on ph. 4747 3200 to know if MICC landfill can accept asbestos waste.

Complaint about asbestos

If you believe a business, contractor or a person at a commercial premise is unsafely handling, removing or transporting asbestos materials, phone Workplace Health and Safety Queensland on 1300 362 128.

If you believe a homeowner, occupant or owner-builder is unsafely handling, removing or transporting asbestos materials or a person has illegally dumped asbestos waste, contact Council. Under *Public Health Act 2005*, Local government is responsible for administration and enforcement of matters in relation to dispersal or release of asbestos fibres in non-work place areas.