

Asbestos Disposal

Asbestos was commonly used in building materials between the 1940s and 1980s. It was used because it is fire resistant, durable and an efficient insulating material. Now that we are aware of the health risks, it is no longer mined in Australia. From December 2003, it will not be imported or used in any Australian products.

Asbestos is a silicate mineral made up of tiny fibres. When it is disturbed, it produces a dust that contains asbestos fibres. Fibres breathed into the lungs can cause a range of health problems including asbestosis, lung cancer and mesothelioma.

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 dust containing asbestos fibres is produced (such as during sanding or sawing). 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. If you do not want to test the material then it should be treated as though it contains asbestos.

A householder may legally remove asbestos from their property. However, it is recommended that only a licensed professional remove loosely bound asbestos.

If you plan to handle asbestos material, you need to take precautions to minimise the release of asbestos fibre. If you do not feel confident to remove the asbestos material, you should contact a licensed asbestos removalist.

How can I help?

- > You must take precautions to protect your family, yourself and the environment when removing, packing, transporting and disposing of asbestos. You should:
 - > Wear a disposable overall, hat and gloves.
 - > Work in a well-ventilated area.
 - > Wear a disposable, half-face particulate respirator or a half-face filter respirator fitted with a dust/particulate cartridge appropriate for asbestos.
 - > Lay plastic dropsheets 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. If necessary, use hand tools instead.
 - > Try not to break the sheets as you remove them.
 - > Place the sheets on the ground, rather than dropping them.
 - > If you need to sweep, use a wet mop.
 - > Vacuum the area with a vacuum cleaner designed for asbestos fibre collection.
 - > After finishing the work, place your clothes in a container marked 'Asbestos contaminated clothing' for disposal.
 - > When you've finished, make sure you thoroughly wash your hands and shower.