

Asbestos In Your Home



Asbestos was commonly used in building materials between the 1940s and late 1980s because of its durability, fire resistance and insulating properties. However, because exposure to asbestos can cause disease, a national ban on the manufacture, importation and installation of products containing asbestos was introduced from 1 January 2004.

Why is asbestos dangerous?

The inhalation of asbestos fibres may result in asbestosis (a progressive scarring of lung tissue) and two forms of cancer - lung cancer and mesothelioma. Because the level of exposure that may cause health problems is unknown, any exposure to asbestos is to be avoided. Whilst even a single exposure to asbestos can be dangerous to your health, the Director of Public Health advises that an isolated exposure to asbestos fibers of short duration is extremely unlikely to result in the development of an asbestos related disease, as fibre concentrations are likely to be insufficient to increase an individual's lifetime cumulative lifetime exposure.

Where can you find asbestos in your home?

Asbestos fibres may be found either firmly or loosely bound in a number of products once used in the Australian building industry.

Firmly-bound asbestos

Fibre-cement products used to contain asbestos fibres that were firmly embedded in a hardened cement mix. This was commonly used in asbestos-cement sheeting, often called "fibro". Asbestos-cement products may be found in many places around the home, including:

- roofing and shingles
- under eaves
- exterior wall cladding
- interior walls and wet areas
- fencing
- thermal boards around fireplaces and in switch boards
- backing material on floor tiles and vinyl flooring
- gaskets and seals in wood stoves
- textured paint
- the brakes, clutches and gaskets of cars
- garages and workshops
- insulation used on hot water pipes, hot water cylinders, domestic heaters and stoves.

Loosely-bound asbestos

The loose form of asbestos fibres was used as insulation in domestic heaters and stoves, and occasionally in ceiling insulation products.

What does asbestos look like?

It is very difficult to identify asbestos by looking at it. If you are uncertain about what a substance is, you should treat it as though it contains asbestos. The only way to be certain is to have a sample analysed by a laboratory. A licensed asbestos removalist could also help identify materials containing asbestos.

What should I do if I find asbestos?

Internal cement sheet walls or ceilings containing asbestos that are in good condition and have been painted or sealed in an appropriate manner do not pose a health risk. External cement roofs and wall claddings containing asbestos do not need to be replaced unless they are broken or the surfaces have deteriorated.

If you are concerned about any asbestos in your home, or if you think you may have asbestos in your home but are unsure, you should contact a licensed asbestos

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removalist who can assist you. A list of licensed asbestos removalists can be found on the Workplace Standards Tasmania website at www.wst.tas.gov.au (search for 'licensed asbestos removalists') or by contacting the Workplace Standards Helpline on 1300 366 322.

May I remove asbestos from my home?

Asbestos is dangerous and while it is not illegal for you to remove asbestos from a property that you own, you are strongly advised not to do so unless you have undertaken training and are competent in safe asbestos removal practices. If you employ someone to remove the asbestos, they must do so in accordance with the *Workplace Health and Safety Regulations 1998*. This means that safe asbestos removal practices must be used at all times, and that large asbestos removal jobs must be done by a licensed asbestos removalist.

Large jobs include (but are not limited to):

- removing asbestos-cement from an area covering more than 100 square metres in a house or outbuilding
- removing asbestos-cement from an area covering more than 20 square metres in other types of buildings or structures
- removing more than one full glove bag of friable (readily crumbled) asbestos material (a glove bag is a special single-use bag made from heavy duty polyethylene).

(Copies of the Workplace Health and Safety Regulations can be purchased from the Printing Authority of Tasmania Bookshop, 2 Salamanca Place Hobart, or call (03) 6233 3289 or freecall 1800 030 940. They are also available on the Internet at www.thelaw.tas.gov.au)

It is recommended that you contact a licensed asbestos removalist if you are considering having asbestos removed from your home.

How do I safely remove asbestos?

Because of the hazardous nature of asbestos fibre, any activity that could result in the generation of dust should not be undertaken. As exposure to asbestos is a serious health risk during removal, packaging, transport and disposal, it is important that it is handled safely during these operations.

It is recommended that you contact a licensed asbestos removalist if you are considering removing any asbestos, especially loosely-bound asbestos, from your home. However, if you are planning to remove any materials containing asbestos yourself, for your own safety you should ensure that you do so in accordance with the *Code of Practice for the Safe Removal of Asbestos* issued by Worksafe Australia. A copy of this standard is available at www.nohsc.gov.au

How do I dispose of asbestos?

Asbestos is classified as a hazardous material, so there are rules about how it can be transported and where it can be disposed of. If you are planning to remove asbestos yourself, you need to contact your local council first. They can tell you how and where to dispose of materials containing asbestos. Your local council can also tell you about any planning approvals or permits that are required before you begin.

For more information contact

A list of asbestos removalists and links to other useful asbestos management information can be found on the Workplace Standards website at www.wst.tas.gov.au or by phoning the Workplace Standards Helpline on 1300 366 322.

Housing Tasmania clients and persons considering purchasing homes from Housing Tasmania who have concerns about asbestos should call the Housing Tasmania Helpline on 1800 808 340.