

ASBESTOS ALERT

Stop. Think Asbestos. Seek Advice.

INFORMATION FOR THE DIY / RENOVATOR



Northern Territory Government

Asbestos information for the DIY / renovator

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Disclaimer

This publication contains information regarding occupational health and safety. It includes some of your obligations under the *Work Health Act* and the *Work Health Regulations (Occupational Health and Safety)* that are administered by NT WorkSafe. 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This publication may refer to legislation that has been amended or repealed.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 legislation.

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NT WorkSafe

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Does your home contain asbestos?

“You can’t tell if cement sheeting contains asbestos just by looking at it!”

Buildings constructed before 1990 may contain asbestos

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

The asbestos website, www.asbestos.nt.gov.au provides details about organisations that perform these tests and inspections. Alternatively, check the *Yellow Pages* listings under ‘asbestos’.

Asbestos cement products have been used extensively as roofing and cladding materials in Australia, but only products fitted before the mid to late 1980s are likely to contain asbestos.

Other asbestos-containing products made before the 1980s may be found in your home. These include water drainage and flue pipes, roofing materials, guttering, vinyl tiles and the underlay to vinyl sheet floors.

Since 31 December 2003, the use of all forms of asbestos has been banned nationally, including in the Northern Territory.

What are the risks?

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

Studies show that these products, if left undisturbed and in a reasonable condition, are not a significant health risk. If the asbestos fibres remain firmly bound in a solid matrix, generally you do not need to remove the asbestos-containing material.

Health problems usually occur when people are unaware of the hazards of working with asbestos-containing materials. 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 volumes of asbestos fibres are released into the air and inhaled. If you follow safety guidelines, living with asbestos-containing materials should not be a problem.

Safe work procedures

Removing asbestos-containing material is a specialised task

In any situation where there is more than the legally allowed 10 square metres* of asbestos-containing material a licensed asbestos removalist must be employed to remove it. You do not need a licence to remove small amounts of asbestos from houses, but you must be familiar with the *Work Health (Occupational Health and Safety) Regulations* pertaining to asbestos and the *Code of Practice for the Safe Removal of Asbestos [NOHSC: 2002 (1988)]*.

Only a licensed asbestos removalist should remove the asbestos-containing underlay to vinyl sheet floors.

*Or any situation in which maintenance is being conducted within one metre of friable asbestos.

Hints for the DIY / renovator

“Do not use power tools ... avoid drilling”

Read the following safety checklist before you start working

□ 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.

□ Do not waterblast or scrub with a stiff broom

It is illegal to waterblast asbestos-containing products. If the material has been accidentally waterblasted, or has suddenly deteriorated in some way, you will need to call a licensed asbestos removalist.

□ To prepare a surface for painting

Gently remove any loose paint with a scraper, keeping the surface wet to minimise the release of fibres. You can use sugar soap to clean the surface.

Remember, do not waterblast and be careful when working on asbestos sheet roofing as it 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

Do not drill holes through eaves, flues or vents. Never cut into asbestos cement sheeting. If an occasional hole is required, mask the area with tape, use a non-powered drill and wear a mask. If significant work is required it is advisable to remove the entire sheet and replace it with a non-asbestos material.

□ Minimise exposure to others

Close doors and windows to limit the spread of any dust. Ensure that people are kept out of the area. Relocate the building's occupants during the work. Talk it over with those who may be affected by the asbestos removal and disposal, for example, your neighbours.

□ Protective equipment

You should wear disposable coveralls and an appropriate mask if you are working with asbestos products.

Hints for the DIY / renovator

Make sure your mask has two straps to hold it firmly in place and is rated as P1 or P2 (your hardware store can supply these). Do not use a mask that only has one strap.

□ Plastic drop sheets

Use drop sheets to collect debris. Precautions should be taken to prevent slip and trip hazards.

□ Don't drop asbestos cement sheets

Remove asbestos sheets carefully. Make sure you lower them gently to the ground. Do not drop them.

□ When to replace asbestos cement sheeting

As with all products, asbestos cement has a limited life. Roofing or other cladding that has weathered to the extent of becoming structurally unsound, or no longer waterproof, should be replaced. It is a legal requirement that a licensed asbestos removalist be employed to dismantle areas greater than 10 square metres of asbestos cement materials.

Cleaning up

□ Stack and wrap

Stack wetted sheets carefully on ground sheets, wrap into bundles for disposal or place them directly into disposable bins that have been pre-lined with some form of sturdy plastic sheeting. Cover and seal with tape before disposal.

□ No skidding

When stacking sheets, do not skid one sheet over another, as this can cause release of fibres.

□ Remove immediately

Do not leave sheets lying about where they may be further broken or crushed by people or traffic. Remove all asbestos waste as soon as you can.

□ Clean up everything

Put used disposable coveralls and masks in bags for removal with other asbestos waste.

□ Clean up thoroughly

Asbestos cement residues in the work area should be cleaned up by wet wiping.

Hints for the DIY / renovator

“It is illegal to place asbestos waste in domestic garbage bins”

Safe disposal

Dispose of all asbestos waste promptly. For safety always:

□ Wet all asbestos waste

Wrap wetted waste in plastic or put it in lined bins or vehicles. It is illegal to place asbestos waste in domestic garbage bins and compactors. Remove all asbestos waste from a site as soon as possible.

□ Dispose of asbestos waste safely

All asbestos-containing waste must be disposed of in a manner and at a site approved by your local council or the Office of Environment and Heritage 8924 4139. Solid asbestos waste should be collected in heavy-duty 200-micron polyethylene bags or other approved containers. It is recommended that bags designed for asbestos disposal be purchased from your hardware store and only filled to 50 per cent of their capacity.

□ Label and wrap

Each bag must be correctly labelled:

**CAUTION – ASBESTOS
AVOID CREATING DUST.
SERIOUS INHALATION
HEALTH HAZARD.**

Large sheets of asbestos should be double wrapped in heavy gauge polyethylene plastic sheet and sealed with tape.

Asbestos waste is treated differently to normal household and industrial refuse, and is usually buried at a special location. Before taking asbestos waste to a disposal site, make arrangements with tip management about what is required. At least 24 hours notice is usually required.

For disposal of asbestos-containing material in a remote location refer to www.asbestos.nt.gov.au

□ No re-sale or re-use

Asbestos cement sheets must not be re-used, offered for sale or given away to other persons except for disposal.

Other things to keep your eye on

Watch for environmental damage

Regularly inspect the condition of asbestos roofing and other sheeting to ensure it has not been damaged by environmental conditions. Badly weathered or damaged sheets may need to be replaced.

Keep guttering (and downpipes) in good repair

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 fibreglass, rockwool, paper or foam. Very few houses in the Northern Territory have loose asbestos insulation in the roof space. However, if you are unsure about this you should have it inspected by an asbestos removalist with an unrestricted license.

Is tank water safe?

Tank water collected from asbestos cement roofing may contain some asbestos.

Drinking this water does not present a health risk. You might consider replacing the roof, or perhaps fitting a water filter to the kitchen tap.

Should external asbestos cement products be coated?

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

In most cases this should be done by a licensed asbestos removalist.

Before carrying out any work:
Stop. Think Asbestos. Seek Advice.

For more information visit
www.asbestos.nt.gov.au or
phone 1800 019 115.

