

1.ASBESTOS INFORMATION

Asbestos is a substance that can have potentially fatal health effects. While asbestos is now banned from use, it was a component of thousands of different products used in the community and industry from the 1940s until the late 1980s.

Disturbed or broken asbestos products or materials can release minute asbestos fibres that once airborne are capable of being inhaled deep into a person's lungs.

It has been used as a primary product in more than 5,000 different construction materials and manufactured products.

All types of asbestos tend to break into very tiny fibres. These individual fibres are so small that many must be identified using a microscope. In fact, some individual fibres may be up to 700 times smaller than a human hair. Because asbestos fibres are so small, once released into the air, they may stay suspended there for hours or even days.

Asbestos fibres are also virtually indestructible. They are resistant to chemicals and heat, and they are very stable in the environment. They do not evaporate into air or dissolve in water, and they are not broken down over time. Asbestos is probably the best insulator ever created.

Types of Asbestos

Asbestos is commonly referred to by three types:

- chrysotile ("white" asbestos - belonging to the serpentine group)
- crocidolite ("blue" asbestos - belonging to the amphibole group)
- amosite ("brown" or "grey" asbestos - belonging to the amphibole group)

Under the law, asbestos-containing materials (ACM's) are divided into two types: This includes Bonded asbestos & Friable asbestos

Bonded asbestos

Bonded asbestos can be found in products such as asbestos cement sheeting commonly used in building materials between 1940s to the late 1980s.

Other bonded asbestos products include:

- profiled sheets used on roofs and walls and flat sheets in flashings
- imitation brick cladding

- roof shingles
- water or flue pipes
- plaster patching compounds
- textured paint
- vinyl floor tiles
- friction products such as brake shoes, disc pads, clutch housings or elevator brakes.

From 1 July 2006, removal of 10m² or more of bonded asbestos can only be done by a holder of a new 'B' class licence.

'B' class licences are issued to applicants who can demonstrate they are familiar with the practices and procedures for removing bonded asbestos set out in the asbestos removal code.

Friable asbestos

Friable asbestos is easily crumbled or reduced to powder by hand.

Common forms of friable asbestos materials include:

- sprayed on fireproofing/soundproofing/thermal insulation
- acoustic plaster soundproofing
- thermal insulation (not sprayed on).

Currently, under the law, all friable asbestos removal work can only be done:

- by certified asbestos removalists who hold a licence to perform asbestos removal work
- as set out in the asbestos removal code.

From 1 July 2006 removal of any friable asbestos can only be done by a holder of a new 'A' class licence or a current certificate to perform

Where is asbestos found?

Materials that contain asbestos can be found in buildings, workplaces and dwellings built before 1990. Even in buildings, workplaces and dwellings built after 1990 it is possible that second hand items installed within them can contain asbestos. Asbestos can also be found in products or materials, for example brake disc pads.

It is often very difficult to identify the presence of asbestos by sight. The only way to be certain is to have a sample of the material analysed by a laboratory.

Where materials are not tested you can presume that something contains asbestos and treat it as such. For example, if there is reliable manufacturer information on a product, a label stating something contains asbestos, or if it is a product of a type and age that typically contains asbestos you can presume it

contains asbestos.

Workplaces

Asbestos was used in a variety of workplaces from the 1940s up until the late 1980s when the dangers to health due to exposure became more widely acknowledged. Asbestos is found in asbestos cement sheeting, as an insulator on pipes and in buildings, as a fire retardant in textiles and as a filtering material in the chemical and food industries.

Dwellings

In Queensland from 1940 until the late 1980s bonded asbestos was commonly used in the manufacture of asbestos-cement corrugated and flat sheets (fibro) for roofing and walls. Undisturbed or painted fibro does not pose a health risk.

Thermal or acoustic insulation used in homes may have also contained friable asbestos, the easily crumbled form of asbestos that can be reduced to powder by hand.

Friable asbestos is extremely dangerous and must only be removed by a certified asbestos removalist (holding either a current licence for asbestos removal work issued between 1 February 2002 and 31 December 2005 or an 'A' class licence for asbestos removal work issued from 1 January 2006).