



Government  
of South Australia

SafeWork SA

## ASBESTOS AND THE HOME RENOVATOR

A basic guide on what you need  
to know about asbestos



*safe*worksa

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

SafeWork SA acknowledges and thanks WorkCover New South Wales for its contribution to the development of this publication, which is based on their publication, 'Living with Fibro'.

## **DISCLAIMER**

This publication contains information regarding occupational health and safety. It includes some of your obligations under the Occupational Health and Safety legislation that SafeWork SA administers. 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This publication may refer to legislation that has been amended or repealed.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 laws.

# DOES YOUR HOUSE CONTAIN ASBESTOS?

The most accurate way to find out if your house contains asbestos cement products or any other asbestos-containing material (ACM) is to have it inspected and tested by a competent person. You can't tell by looking at it!

As a guide, asbestos cement products made before the mid to late 1980s contain asbestos. However, other asbestos-containing products made before the 1980s may also be found in the home, including water drainage pipes, flue pipes, pipe lagging, roofing shingles, guttering, vinyl tiles, underlay and asbestos-backed vinyl floor covering. It is always best to have suspect products tested to be sure of what they are made.

All forms of asbestos are divided broadly into two groups: *friable and non-friable*.

**Friable asbestos** is any material that contains asbestos and is in the form of a powder or can be easily crumbled, pulverised or reduced to powder by hand pressure when dry. Examples include, but are not limited to: insulating rope on old oven doors, asbestos insulation, asbestos fire blankets.

**NOTE:** This may include ACM that have been subjected to conditions that leave them in a state where they meet the above definition, such as weathering, physical damage, water damage etc.

**Non-friable asbestos**, also referred to as 'bonded asbestos', is any material that contains asbestos in a bonded matrix. It may consist of cement or resin/ binders and cannot be crushed by hand when dry. Examples include, but are not limited to, asbestos cement fences, roof shingles, 'fibro' cladding.

The use of all forms of asbestos is banned in Australia (ban introduced 31 December 2003), with only a few, very specific, exemptions.

## WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

Breathing in asbestos fibres may lead to the development of lung cancer, pleural plaques, pleural thickening, asbestosis and mesothelioma. Your health is not necessarily at risk if you find that your home or workplace contains materials made from asbestos. Studies show these products, if left undisturbed and in reasonable condition, do not necessarily present a significant health risk.

If the asbestos fibres remain firmly bound in a solid matrix, you generally do not need to remove the ACM. Even weathered asbestos roofing may not release airborne fibres unless disturbed or handled in a way that damages the material.

Health problems tend to occur when people are unaware of the hazards of working with ACM. The key is to guard against and prevent exposure.

Always carry out work in a way that minimises damage to any ACM and the resulting production of dust or small particles. ACM becomes a health risk when large amounts of asbestos fibres are released into the air and inhaled. If you follow safety guidelines, living with ACM should pose a minimal health risk.

# SAFE WORK PROCEDURES

For South Australian workplaces, there are Asbestos Regulations (under the *Occupational Health, Safety and Welfare Act 1986*) for the identification, registering and handling of ACM.

There is no legal requirement for individual homeowners to have a licence to remove ACM from their own property. However, due to the risk of exposure during removal, it is strongly recommended that you engage a licensed asbestos removal contractor to remove any friable asbestos and use the same precautionary measures as for removal of non-friable asbestos.

It is also recommended that a licensed asbestos contractor remove the asbestos containing underlay to vinyl sheet floors, as the asbestos is often in a friable form and this presents a greater risk of asbestos fibre exposure. Asbestos removal contractors have specialist equipment that may be required for this type of work.

As the homeowner, if you are undertaking maintenance or minor asbestos removal work, it is important to apply the safety control measures outlined in the following pages to ensure you minimise risks to health from exposure to asbestos fibres.

A licensed asbestos removal contractor is **not required on a worksite**:

- to remove insulation material that consists of or contains asbestos, or other friable ACM, for the purpose of carrying out maintenance or repair work, where:
  - i) the material to be removed does not extend more than 1 metre in any direction from the place of maintenance or repair
  - ii) the total amount of material to be removed does not cover more than 0.5 square metres.

A licensed asbestos removal contractor **must be used on a worksite** to remove asbestos-cement (fibro) products or other non-friable ACM that covers more than 10 square metres.

For a list of organisations that can perform asbestos tests and inspections, refer to the 'OHS/Asbestos' pages at [www.safework.sa.gov.au](http://www.safework.sa.gov.au) or consult the 'Yellow Pages' under asbestos. The 'HELP AND ADVICE' section at the end of this publication also provides useful contact details and resources.



*Fully licensed asbestos contractor removing the asbestos-containing underlay to vinyl sheet floors*

# SAFETY PROCEDURES AND CONTROL MEASURES

## 1. Prepare for the task

- **Find out about your local asbestos disposal requirements**

Dumps licensed by the Environment Protection Authority (EPA) accept asbestos waste in a variety of packaged forms. Your locally listed waste disposal depot will have details on cost and packaging requirements.

**NOTE:** Some disposal sites require larger amounts of asbestos cement sheets to be palletised. See point 4 under 'CLEANING UP AND SAFE DISPOSAL' for more details.

- **Gather equipment**

You will need a range of personal protective equipment (PPE) i.e. disposable coveralls\*, laceless boots or shoe covers, P1 or P2 disposable respirator/ dust mask\* (Australian Standards approved) and disposable gloves (based on risk assessment). You will also require plastic bags or plastic sheeting (200 micron)\*, tools\*\*, duct tape, rags for cleaning up and a spray bottle for wetting down.

- **Inform**

Inform those who may be affected by the asbestos removal and disposal e.g. your neighbours.

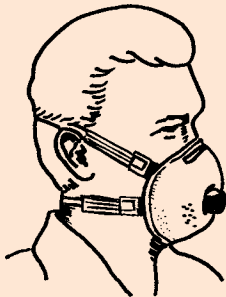
- **Prepare the area**

Turn off power (if required), clear away objects, cover drain holes, size your drop sheet, use barrier tape to restrict the work area (if required), fill spray bottles with water (or 1:10 PVA glue to water mixture).

## 2. Suit up

- Put on your PPE i.e. Cat 5 disposable coveralls\* and a P1 or P2 disposable respirator/ dust mask\* (Australian Standards approved). Ensure you wear the respiratory protection correctly and put the respirator on first (so it can come off last).

### Examples of appropriate respiratory protection



*Disposable,  
half-face  
particulate  
respirator*



*Half-face  
particulate  
filter (cartridge)  
respirator*

*\*Your hardware store can supply all of the materials and equipment you will need.*

*\*\*Do not use power tools as this may cause asbestos fibres to be released into the air.*

*Non-powered tools generate less dust and should be used.*

### 3. Wet the area

- Lay out your drop sheet and spray the area with water (or 1:10 PVA to water mixture).
- Keep the area wet to minimise the release of fibres.
- To prepare for painting, gently remove any loose paint with a paint scraper. Minimise the release of fibres by keeping the surface wet (wiping with a moist cloth is sufficient).
- **Never** water blast asbestos cement products. This is illegal.
- Be careful when you are on a roof as asbestos sheets 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 contains asbestos.

### 4. Remove ACM with care

- Remove asbestos cement sheets carefully, avoid breakage and do not drop them.
- Stack asbestos cement sheets carefully on the ground.
- Do not skid one sheet over another as this can release asbestos fibres.
- Never drill holes through eaves, flues or vents.
- Never cut into an asbestos cement sheet.

**NOTE:** If significant work is required on a roof sheet, remove and replace with a non-asbestos product.

## CLEANING UP AND SAFE DISPOSAL

### 1. Cleaning the area

- Spray and wipe down all surfaces and place debris into waste bags.
- **DO NOT** use a vacuum cleaner to remove dust unless the machine is an industrial type fitted with a high efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter and can be wet washed to decontaminate.
- A domestic or standard vacuum cleaner **MUST NOT** be used for cleaning dust containing asbestos, as the asbestos will pass right through the filter and blow back into the air.
- Place all rags used for wiping down in an asbestos disposal plastic bag.
- Carefully place drop sheets in an asbestos disposal plastic bag.
- Wet wipe any tools used during the work and treat the cleaning cloth as asbestos-contaminated.

## 2. Disposal preparation

- Wet all asbestos waste and place in thick plastic bags (200 micron)\* or wrap in plastic sheets (200 micron)\* or place directly in plastic-lined bins or vehicles.
- Tape ends and seal all bags and packages and label '**CAUTION: ASBESTOS, DO NOT INHALE DUST**'.

**NOTE:** It is illegal to put asbestos waste in domestic garbage bins and compactors.

## 3. Removing PPE

- Remove respiratory protection last.
- Remove disposable coveralls and turn inside out.
- Used disposable coveralls and masks should go into sealed bags for removal with other asbestos waste.
- Wash hands and shower/wash hair.

## 4. Safe disposal

- Dispose of asbestos waste at your local council's EPA approved waste disposal site.
- Asbestos can only be dumped at EPA approved disposal sites.
- The EPA can advise you of the location of these sites. See 'HELP AND ADVICE' for contact numbers or search for 'asbestos' on the EPA website for the disposal information sheet.



*Cleaning up and safe disposal*

*\*Your hardware store can supply all of the materials and equipment you will need.*

## EXTERNAL ASBESTOS CEMENT PRODUCTS

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

- Roofing that has weathered, is structurally unsound and no longer waterproof should be replaced. It is recommended that you use a licensed asbestos removal contractor as it is extremely dangerous to access the asbestos roofing due to its brittle and fragile nature.
- If you do need to access the roof, put planks down so that people do not have to walk directly on it. Alternatively, consult with an experienced and competent person.
- Wear appropriate respiratory protection and disposable coveralls.

## OTHER THINGS TO KEEP YOUR EYE ON

- **Environmental damage**  
Regularly inspect the condition of asbestos roofs and other sheeting to ensure they have not been damaged. Badly weathered or damaged sheets may need to be replaced.
- **Guttering and downpipes**  
Asbestos fibres may collect in gutters after heavy rain, guttering and downpipes on buildings with asbestos roofing should be in good repair. Wet roof gutters before removing them and wrap them carefully.
- **Insulation**  
Insulation materials in house roof spaces are usually fibreglass, rockwool, cellulose or foam. Very few houses in South Australia contain loose asbestos insulation in the roof space. If you are unsure about this, have it inspected by a competent person.
- **Fire damage**  
Fire damage to property containing asbestos products could create loose asbestos fibres due to intense heat. A licensed asbestos contractor should be engaged for cleaning up damaged areas.

# HELP AND ADVICE

## RESOURCES

The following resources provide more detailed information on the safe removal and disposal of asbestos products.

- *Occupational Health, Safety and Welfare Regulations 2010*  
– Part 5, Division 2 Asbestos
- National Code of Practice for the Safe Removal of Asbestos (2005)
- National Code of Practice for the Management and Control of Asbestos in Workplaces (2005)
- SafeWork SA *Asbestos and the Home Renovator* and *Asbestos in the Workplace* publications (available at [www.safework.sa.gov.au](http://www.safework.sa.gov.au) – look under 'OHS/Asbestos').
- Environment Protection Authority Asbestos Waste Sheet:  
[www.epa.sa.gov.au/xstd\\_files/Waste/Guideline/guide\\_asbestos.pdf](http://www.epa.sa.gov.au/xstd_files/Waste/Guideline/guide_asbestos.pdf)

## **USEFUL CONTACTS**

### **SAFEWORK SA HELP CENTRE**

Telephone: 1300 365 255  
[www.safework.sa.gov.au](http://www.safework.sa.gov.au)

### **DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE**

Telephone: (08) 8226 7100  
[www.health.sa.gov.au/pehs/environ-health-index.htm](http://www.health.sa.gov.au/pehs/environ-health-index.htm)

### **THE ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH OFFICER (EHO) AT YOUR LOCAL COUNCIL**

[www.lga.sa.gov.au](http://www.lga.sa.gov.au)

### **ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION AUTHORITY (EPA)**

Telephone: (08) 8204 2004  
[www.epa.sa.gov.au](http://www.epa.sa.gov.au)

### **ASBESTOS VICTIMS ASSOCIATION (SA) INC.**

Telephone: (08) 8212 6008 or Freecall 1800 665 395  
[www.avasa.asn.au](http://www.avasa.asn.au)

### **ASBESTOS DISEASES SOCIETY OF SA INC.**

Telephone: (08) 8359 2423 or Freecall 1800 157 540  
[www.adssa-inc.com.au](http://www.adssa-inc.com.au)



# SAFEWORK SA

[www.safework.sa.gov.au](http://www.safework.sa.gov.au)

## HELP CENTRE 1300 365 255

Email: [help@safework.sa.gov.au](mailto:help@safework.sa.gov.au)

(the Help Centre closes at 4.15pm on Wednesdays)

To report all serious workplace injuries and incidents  
telephone **1800 777 209** (24-hour service).

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## LIBRARY AND BOOKSHOP

Ground floor, 100 Waymouth Street, Adelaide

### LIBRARY

Telephone: **(08) 8204 8877**

Facsimile: (08) 8204 8883

Email: [library@safework.sa.gov.au](mailto:library@safework.sa.gov.au)

### BOOKSHOP

Telephone: **(08) 8204 8881** or **(08) 8204 8882**

Facsimile: (08) 8204 8883

Email: [bookshop@safework.sa.gov.au](mailto:bookshop@safework.sa.gov.au)

Opening hours: 8.30am – 5pm, Monday to Friday

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## OFFICES

### HEAD OFFICE

Level 4, 33 Richmond Road, Keswick

GPO Box 465, Adelaide, SA 5001

DX 715, Adelaide

### REGIONAL OFFICES

Located at Berri, Mount Gambier,

Port Lincoln, Port Pirie and Whyalla.

Telephone: **1300 365 255**

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### FREE INTERPRETING SERVICE

Telephone the Interpreting and Translating Centre  
on **(08) 8226 1990** and ask them to contact SafeWork SA.

### HEARING AND SPEECH ASSISTANCE

Contact us through the National Relay Service and ask  
for SafeWork SA 1300 365 255.

- for TTY/Voice: **133 677**
- Speak and Listen: **1300 555 727**
- [www.relayservice.com.au](http://www.relayservice.com.au)