

# ASBESTOS ALERT

Stop. Think Asbestos. Seek Advice.

**INFORMATION FOR  
TRADES / CONTRACTORS**



Northern Territory Government

# Asbestos information for trades / contractors

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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 (Occupational Health and Safety) Regulations* 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This publication may refer to legislation that has been amended or repealed.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.

## Acknowledgements

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**NT WorkSafe**

Supported by Unions NT

## Asbestos in Territory buildings

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

If you work in the building or construction industry you need to be aware of asbestos. Contractors and tradespeople carrying out maintenance, demolition or renovation work on buildings constructed before 1990 could be exposed to asbestos.

### **Can materials containing asbestos be identified?**

Unless a material is labelled you cannot tell whether or not it contains asbestos simply by looking. If in doubt, treat the material as if it contains asbestos or have it sampled and analysed by a qualified professional. Sampling can be more hazardous than leaving the material alone, so taking samples yourself is not recommended. Only material that is damaged or will be disturbed should be sampled: material that is in good condition and will not be disturbed should be left alone.

Anyone who samples asbestos-containing materials should have as much information as

possible on the handling of asbestos before sampling and, at a minimum, should observe the following procedures:

- Make sure no one else is in the immediate area when sampling is done.
- Wear a mask (P1 or P2 particulate respirator).
- Wear disposable gloves or wash hands after sampling.
- Shut down any heating or cooling systems to minimise the spread of released fibres.
- Do not disturb the material any more than is necessary in order to take a small sample.
- Place a plastic sheet on the floor below the area to be sampled.
- Wet the material using a fine mist of water containing a few drops of detergent before taking the sample. The water/detergent mist will reduce the release of asbestos fibres.

# Asbestos in Territory buildings

- **DO NOT USE POWER TOOLS.**  
Carefully cut a piece from the entire depth of the material using a small knife, corer or other sharp object. Place the sample into a clean, sealable container.
- Carefully dispose of the plastic sheet. Use a damp cloth to clean up any loose material on the container and in the area sampled. Dispose of all asbestos material and waste safely and according to local procedures.
- Label the container with an identification number and clearly state when and where the sample was taken.
- Patch the sampled area with duct tape to prevent asbestos fibre release.
- Take the sample to a licensed asbestos removalist who will have the sample analysed by a National Association of Testing Authorities (NATA) laboratory to confirm the presence of asbestos. A list of licensed asbestos removalists is available on the asbestos website [www.asbestos.nt.gov.au](http://www.asbestos.nt.gov.au) and in the *Yellow Pages* under 'asbestos'.

# Understanding asbestos

“If in doubt,  
assume  
material  
contains  
asbestos”

## **When is asbestos dangerous?**

Asbestos fibres are not generally considered harmful unless they are inhaled. Inhalation is the most common way for asbestos to enter the body.

Asbestos is most dangerous when it is ‘friable’, which means it crumbles easily and has the potential to release fibres into the air. For example, sprayed-on fireproofing is generally friable but asbestos floor tiles and cement sheeting are not.

Materials containing asbestos will not usually release asbestos fibres unless disturbed or damaged.

## **What are the health hazards of asbestos?**

All types of asbestos can break into very tiny fibres, so small that they must be identified using a microscope. Once the fibres get into the air they can be inhaled deep into the lungs.

Asbestos fibres can cause asbestosis, lung cancer and mesothelioma. A number of factors can determine the likelihood of developing these illnesses.

## **Amount and duration of exposure**

The more you are exposed, the more fibres may enter your body, the more likely you may be to develop asbestos related diseases. Historically this was the case with industrial workers such as pipe fitters, boilermakers, and those applying sprayed-on insulation.

# Understanding asbestos

## How to avoid asbestos exposure

Individuals can avoid exposure to asbestos by:

- Being aware of, and keeping informed about, likely locations of asbestos-containing materials.
- Assuming unknown materials are asbestos.
- Avoiding contact with suspect materials and contacting your supervisor immediately with concerns.
- Keeping others out of areas where damaged asbestos is found.
- Never cutting, sanding, drilling or otherwise damaging any suspect materials.
- Never sanding or dry buffing floor tiles or adhesives and using only wet stripping methods. Floor maintenance should be done with low abrasion pads used at low speeds.
- Never disturbing damaged, suspect materials.

## Reporting and responding to damaged materials

It is important to report damaged asbestos-containing materials to your supervisor immediately so they can be cleaned up or properly repaired by a licensed asbestos removalist.

Removing asbestos-containing material is a specialised task. In any situation in which there is more than the legally allowed 10 square metres\* of such material a licensed asbestos removalist must be employed to remove it. You do not need a licence to remove small amounts of asbestos from buildings, but you must follow 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)]*.

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

## Hints for trades / contractors

“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 materials. 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

# Hints for trades / contractors

asbestos products. 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-containing 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.

## 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.

## Hints for trades / contractors

“It is illegal to sell or reuse asbestos sheets”

- **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.

- **What to do with waste**

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 material containing asbestos in a remote location refer to [www.asbestos.nt.gov.au](http://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.

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

For more information visit [www.asbestos.nt.gov.au](http://www.asbestos.nt.gov.au) or phone 1800 019 115.