

## What is asbestos?

Asbestos is a naturally occurring mineral found in the surface of the earth. It contains strong fibres that have excellent durability, fire resistance, and insulating properties. Asbestos fibres are 50 to 200 times thinner than a human hair, come in many forms, can float in the air for a long time, can be invisible to the naked eye and can be breathed into the lungs.

Materials containing asbestos were very common in the Australian residential building industry between the 1940s and late 1980s before their production stopped. The use of all forms of asbestos has been banned nationally since 31 December 2003. The ban does not apply to asbestos installed prior to this date (eg. asbestos materials in houses).



## Forms of asbestos

Asbestos has been used in the manufacturing of various products. These products can be found in either friable or non-friable form.

**Friable** - are generally quite loose and when dry, can be crumbled into fine material or dust with very light pressure. These products usually contain high levels of asbestos which is loosely held in the product so that the asbestos fibres are easily released into the air.

If disturbed, friable asbestos products are dangerous because the asbestos fibres can get into the air very easily and may be inhaled by people who are working in the immediate area.

Examples of friable asbestos-containing material may include:

- pipe lagging
- boiler insulation
- fire retardant material
- sprayed insulation.

**Non-friable** - are made from a bonding compound (such as cement) mixed with a small proportion (usually less than 15%) of asbestos. Bonded asbestos products are solid, rigid, and cannot be crumbled by hand pressure. The asbestos fibres are tightly bound in the product and are not normally released into the air.

When in a good condition, bonded asbestos products do not normally release any asbestos fibres into the air and are therefore considered to a very low risk for people who are in contact with them.

Common names for bonded asbestos are 'fibro', 'asbestos cement' and 'AC sheeting'.

Other examples of non friable asbestos containing material include:

- vinyl floor tiles
- bitumen-based water proofing.

## How to manage asbestos

Unfortunately it is not possible to find out whether a material contains asbestos by simply looking at it. If in doubt, it is very important to treat this material as if it is asbestos, or to be certain, the material can be sent off to a laboratory to be tested.

Householders who are undertaking home renovations are strongly advised to engage in experienced and licensed professionals to undertake the asbestos works including the removal and disposal.

As a householder, you may carry out minor repairs on asbestos materials, as long as the recommended safety precautions are followed. This includes the use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) such as disposable protective clothing and a disposable P2 mask or half-face filter respirator.

Once the material is removed it needs to be carefully packaged into two layers of 0.2mm thick polythene sheeting, tied, sealed, labelled 'CAUTION ASBESTOS' so it is ready for disposal.

You can only dispose of asbestos at an EPA approved and licensed site. These sites can be found at: <http://www.epa.vic.gov.au/your-environment/waste/landfills-that-accept-asbestos-in-victoria>

Some jobs however are best left to the experts. If you are considering a renovation that involves disturbing large amounts of asbestos materials, removing friable asbestos products, or demolition of all or part of your property, don't do this work yourself. Engage a licensed asbestos removalist who knows how to manage this work safely and without risk to you or your neighbours.

## Asbestos health facts

We are all exposed to low levels of asbestos everyday in the air we breathe. It only becomes a potential risk to health if the fibres are suspended in the air and breathed into the lungs. Breathing asbestos into the lungs can cause a range of diseases, including mesothelioma, lung cancer and asbestosis.

Whether or not a person goes on to develop an asbestos related disease depends on a range of circumstances or exposure factors, such as the level and duration of exposure; length of time since the first exposure or the fibre type and concurrent exposure to other carcinogens like tobacco smoke.

When asbestos fibres are breathed in, they may remain deep within the lungs. They can lodge in lung tissue and cause inflammation, scarring and some more serious asbestos-related diseases, which usually take many years, if not decades to develop.

## For more information

WorkSafe Victoria is the first point of call. They can be contacted on 1800 136 089 or you can visit their website [www.worksafe.vic.gov.au](http://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au)

For further information on asbestos removal or disposal please visit the Environment Protection Authorities website [www.epa.vic.gov.au](http://www.epa.vic.gov.au)

Where you have concerns about a home owner removing asbestos material or require any further general information please contact Council's Community Health Services team on 9294 5603.

**City Offices Service Centre**  
Braeside Avenue, Ringwood

**Croydon Service Centre**  
Civic Square, Croydon

**The Ringwood Centre Service Centre**  
1 Civic Place, Ringwood

Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS): 131 450

National Relay Service (NRS): 133 677

1300 88 22 33 or 9298 4598

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