

Asbestos

Australia has one of the highest asbestos-related mortality rates in the world.

It is estimated that approximately 2,500 Australian's are diagnosed each year with an asbestos related illness, a figure that is expected to increase into the future.

Diseases such as Mesothelioma, Asbestosis and Lung Cancer have all been causally linked to asbestos exposure.

Used extensively in the building and construction industries during the mid to latter half of the 20th century, asbestos is a naturally-occurring fibrous material. Its applications include insulation products, vinyl flooring, roofing and some paint and plaster products to name a few. Many residential housing estates and schools employed fibro cement sheeting and corrugated asbestos cement products in their construction.

Composed of long silicate fibres, the three most common forms of asbestos found in Australia are: blue; brown or grey; and white. Problems generally occur when asbestos fibres break off and contaminate the air. Such breakages may be caused by renovations and building works, weather or the general ageing of materials. If inhaled, even in small quantities, asbestos can be deadly.

Given the potential seriousness of asbestos related disease, it is the obligation of all organisations, to take a zero tolerance approach to asbestos in the workplace.

Taking a risk management approach to asbestos

Before you can manage the risk of asbestos exposure, you first need to identify a) whether asbestos has been used in the construction of the property you occupy or b) the risk that asbestos in your workplace will cause illness.

Remember, if your property was constructed between 1945 and 1970, there is a good chance asbestos has been used in its construction.

If you have not already done so, engage a specialist provider and arrange an asbestos inspection. If you have

previously received an asbestos report, review it and verify whether its recommendations have been implemented.

If asbestos is identified in your workplace, you must conduct a risk assessment to ascertain potential risks associated with having asbestos and implement an action plan to treat asbestos risk exposures.

Example: Asbestos risks:

Hazard	Risk	Risk ranking
Deteriorated asbestos material in buildings	Potential contact with asbestos	High risk
Tradesperson drilling into asbestos sheeting	Asbestos fibres becoming airborne	Very high risk

Treating your risks

- Identify your legislative requirements in relation to asbestos and ensure risk treatments are implemented.
- Where the presence of asbestos is confirmed or presumed, warning signs and labels should be installed.
- Consult with staff and contractors to determine what maintenance or service tasks may disturb Asbestos Containing Material (ACM).
- Develop and implement an asbestos management policy and procedures.
- Develop, implement and regularly maintain an asbestos management plan (plan to remove asbestos in the long term if immediate removal is not an option).
- Develop and maintain an asbestos register.
- Provide training for workers, contractors and other potentially affected parties on asbestos safety.

- Communicate and consult with all employees and other relevant persons regarding asbestos.
- Develop safe work Instructions for maintenance and service workers to avoid contact with asbestos.
- Ensure contractors and staff are provided with occupational health and safety inductions, including the sighting of the asbestos register.
- Make certain regular visual inspections of the asbestos are conducted by a competent person.
- Keep records of visual inspections of the asbestos in the asbestos register.
- Provide health surveillance of workers exposed to asbestos.
- Engage only qualified and licensed asbestos removalists to safely remove and dispose of asbestos.
(Note: unlicensed removal of limited amounts of asbestos may be allowed in some circumstances. It is recommended that this be verified with your local Workers Compensation authority)
- Following asbestos removal or demolition, engage a specialist provider to inspect and test the premises and provide a certificate of clearance. Ideally the provider should be employed independently of the asbestos removalist to prevent any conflict of interest.

Monitoring and review

Monitor and review the implemented asbestos treatments, asbestos management plan and register at regular intervals to ascertain effectiveness and amend treatments if deemed inadequate.

The most effective and long-term treatment for asbestos is to have it removed and disposed of by a licensed and registered asbestos removalist.

Further resources

Safe Work Australia

www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au

Asbestos Disease Foundation of Australia

www.adfa.org.au

World Health Organisation

www.who.int/countries/aus/en

Asbestos Disease Advisory Service of Australia

www.asbestosdiseases.org.au/asbestosinfo/medical_research.htm

OH&S Authority in your state or territory

Relevant standards, regulations and acts

State and Territory legislation sets out the specific requirements in relation to ACM.

HB 266: 2010 Guide to managing risk in not-for-profit organizations

National Occupational Health And Safety Commission, Code Of Practice For The Management And Control Of Asbestos In Workplaces [NOHSC: 2018], 2005

National Code of Practice for the Safe Removal of Asbestos [NOHSC:2002 (2005)]

References:

*Source: The Safe Work Australia Online Statistics Interactive National Workers' Compensation Statistics Databases.

National Occupational Health And Safety Commission, Code Of Practice For The Management And Control Of Asbestos In Workplaces [NOHSC: 2018], 2005

Risk Management Helpdesk

For further information and assistance on asbestos or to obtain a copy of our asbestos checklist, please contact the Risk Management Helpdesk on **1300 660 827**.

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the Risk Management Helpdesk on**

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www.ccinsurances.com.au

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