



FACT SHEET

ASBESTOS

Information for Tenants



The Housing Authority has the long term aim of ensuring all buildings within its portfolio are free of materials containing asbestos. To this end, the Authority maintains a register of all buildings that still contain asbestos products and works to minimize and eliminate the associated risks. Asbestos products are assessed for safety at every property inspection by a qualified Housing officer.

What is asbestos?

Asbestos is a naturally occurring fibrous crystalline mineral found in rock formations. Three main types of asbestos have been mined in Australia: crocidolite (blue asbestos), amosite (brown asbestos) and chrysotile (white asbestos).

What is asbestos cement?

Asbestos cement is made from a bonding compound mixed with a small proportion (usually less than 15%) of loose asbestos fibres. This process was used to produce a variety of materials, particularly building materials, due to its durability, fire resistance and insulation properties.

When was asbestos used?

Asbestos cement materials were first manufactured in the 1920s and between the 1940s and 1980s were commonly used in residential buildings. Many houses built before 1990, therefore, contain asbestos products but only some built in the 1990s and early 2000s do.

When was asbestos banned?

In Australia, the use and import of blue and brown asbestos was banned in the mid-1980s and the manufacture or import of white asbestos was banned in December 2003.

Where can you find asbestos in the home?

Asbestos fibres may be present in a number of products previously used in homes including:

- roofing and shingles
- exterior and interior wall cladding
- fencing
- thermal boards around fireplaces
- backing material on floor tiles and vinyl flooring
- asbestos-rope door gaskets in wood stoves
- textured paints and decorative ceiling coatings
- insulation used on hot water pipes, domestic heaters and stoves.

How do you recognise asbestos products?

It is difficult to determine if a material contains asbestos simply by looking at it but an examination by a qualified Housing officer can verify its presence. If in doubt, treat suspect material as though it does contain asbestos.

What are the health effects caused by exposure to asbestos?

When asbestos fibres are breathed in, they remain deep within the lungs and cause inflammation and scarring. Exposure can also cause asbestosis, pleural plaque, lung cancer and mesothelioma, which usually take many years or decades to develop.

The risk of developing an asbestos-related disease depends on the total number of fibres inhaled.

To date, the majority of people who have developed asbestos-related diseases have been exposed to relatively large numbers of fibres as a result of contact with the material in their occupation.

What is the risk?

Generally, undisturbed asbestos cement products do not pose a health risk as the fibres are bound together in a solid cement matrix, however, if the material is damaged or disturbed, fibres may be released into the air. The use of power tools for cutting, drilling, grinding, sanding or sawing the material can release significant numbers of fibres as can the use of high pressure water blasters to clean the material prior to painting. These activities must not be performed.

What do you do when you see newly damaged or disturbed asbestos?

It is vital that you immediately report any damaged or disturbed asbestos to your tenancy manager.

Public housing, GROH and Aboriginal Housing Services need to contact Housing Direct on 1300 137 677.

More information about asbestos in the home is available in 'Asbestos: A Guide for Householders and the General Public' available on the Department of Health's website.