



## The potential health risks of asbestos

Asbestos is deadly. It is a known carcinogen, and the inhalation of asbestos is associated with increased incidences of a number of diseases including pleural disease, asbestosis, lung cancer and mesothelioma.

Asbestos poses a health risk when airborne fibres are generated either through degradation or from building related activity such as drilling or sanding. The degree of asbestos fibre release and inhalation or ingestion exposure is partly dependent upon the type of material binding the asbestos and its general condition.

While exposure does not make development of an asbestos-related disease inevitable, even limited or short-term exposure to asbestos fibres can be dangerous. Many victims of asbestos-related disease in the past were the children and wives of workers who brought asbestos home on their clothes. We are now seeing an emerging trend of 'third wave' victims of asbestos disease – people who never worked with asbestos in an occupational setting, but were exposed to it through activities such as home renovations. There is still much unknown about why some people are susceptible to these diseases, while others who have been regularly exposed to asbestos may avoid contracting one.

## What should I do if asbestos is present?

It is important to know exactly what your obligations and requirements are prior to starting any work where asbestos may be disturbed. The safe and proper handling of asbestos material is overseen by a number of different agencies including your local council, the Department of Health and the Environmental Protection Agency in your state or territory. In addition to the health risks, there are many potential penalties for doing the wrong thing.

Once asbestos has been identified, it is important that you are aware of its location and its condition. Asbestos that is in good condition, well maintained and unlikely to be disturbed may be left safely in place and monitored for any signs of deterioration. Asbestos that is in poor condition or will likely be disturbed as part of a renovation process should be removed and disposed of by a licenced asbestos removalist.

## Finding an asbestos removalist

To find a licenced asbestos removalist you should contact your state or territory's work health and safety regulator.



## Handling and disposing of asbestos waste

If you are going to come into contact with any asbestos materials, you should first familiarise yourself with information on how this can be done to minimise the risk of exposure. Visit the agency's website for more information.

It is illegal in all states and territories to dispose of asbestos waste in domestic garbage bins and general waste skips. This unlawful disposal of asbestos material can result in exposure to asbestos for other workers and the general community as well as the potential for a range of penalties. All asbestos waste must be disposed of at a landfill that is licenced to accept asbestos waste.

All asbestos waste must be placed in specific asbestos waste bags or double wrapped in thick plastic (>200 micron thick) and sealed using duct tape. Bags should be labelled with appropriate signage stating that they contain asbestos and that dust creation and inhalation should be avoided.

## Finding more information

Visit [www.asbestossafety.gov.au](http://www.asbestossafety.gov.au) for more information on identifying asbestos in your home.



Use the QR code to navigate to the agency website.

## Contact Details

Web: [www.asbestossafety.gov.au](http://www.asbestossafety.gov.au)

Email: [enquiries@asbestossafety.gov.au](mailto:enquiries@asbestossafety.gov.au)

Twitter: @AsbestosSafety

Some photos in this document are courtesy of [asbestosawareness.com.au](http://asbestosawareness.com.au)



Australian Government

Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency

# Asbestos in the home

[www.asbestossafety.gov.au](http://www.asbestossafety.gov.au)



## Asbestos in the home

If your house was built or renovated before the 1990s it is likely to contain some form of asbestos material. Due to its prevalence in Australian homes, it is important to know whether your house contains asbestos and how to deal with it safely.

## What is asbestos?

Asbestos is the name given to a group of six different fibrous minerals occurring naturally in our environment. It was widely used in the past because it was a cheap and simple way to solve many material design problems. Australia was one of the highest users of asbestos in the world up until the mid-1980s and its widespread use has left a legacy of asbestos-containing materials in our built environment.

## Where might asbestos be found?

If you're planning home renovations, it is important to first know whether asbestos may be present. Many people are unaware of the full range of materials that contain asbestos found in and around Australian homes. Asbestos was added to over 3,000 different products, including those used in areas commonly renovated by homeowners like bathrooms, kitchens and under vinyl floors and in carpet underlay.

You should consider engaging an experienced asbestos assessor to undertake an assessment to identify any potential asbestos materials. While the only way to confirm the presence of asbestos is through sample analysis under microscopic examination, it is best to assume that suspected materials are asbestos if there is any doubt.

# Where is asbestos in my home?

The following images are examples of what asbestos in your home may look like and where it may be found. Asbestos was used all around the home for a variety of purposes and the examples provided below are only some of the places it may be found.



Fencing



Cement roofing, and gutters



Downpipes



Eaves



Electrical meter backing boards



Sheds



Outbuildings



Asbestos lining behind tiles



Splashbacks in wet areas



Walls



Ceilings



Vinyl underlay (found in a variety of patterns and colours)



Carpet underlay

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