

WorkSafe Victoria – Victorian School Building Authority – The largest ever school asbestos removal program in Victoria

Strategy:

Removal

Outcome:

(O4.3) Asbestos removal infrastructure can meet the future needs and demands of ageing ACMs without creating increased risk

Deliverable:

(D4.2) Develop and conduct projects in various locations and conditions where ACMs are in poor condition or likely to cause risks to ensure removal approaches are effective

Location:

Victoria

The issue

The Victorian School Building Authority (VSBA), established in 2016, is a division of the Department of Education and Training. The VSBA oversees the design and construction of new schools, as well as the modernisation and upgrade of existing ones. The VSBA supports schools to meet their obligations under the Occupational Health and Safety Regulations 2017 (Vic) to identify, manage and remove asbestos.

The VSBA also delivers the Victorian Government's commitment to remove all identified asbestos that may pose a risk from government schools by 2020. To achieve this, the VSBA firstly identified 1,712 government school sites throughout Victoria in 2015–16, which consequently identified 497 sites containing high-risk asbestos (friable, poor condition), and 1,200 sites containing asbestos that may pose a risk (that is, medium-risk asbestos that are non-friable but susceptible to future deterioration and damage). These findings highlighted the need to implement a program to remove all identified high risk asbestos of this nature.

Action taken

The audit of 1,712 school sites identified asbestos across various places in school buildings. This is due to the widespread application of asbestos in all kinds of building material, including thermal insulation, fireproofing materials, asbestos cement sheets, asbestos cement moulded products, vinyl floor adhesives, gaskets, electrical switchboards and insulators, mastics and equipment.

Over four years, \$200 million was invested in the Asbestos Removal Program to undertake the largest ever removal of asbestos from Victoria's government schools.

The program consists of three components:

- planned removal of identified high risk asbestos from 497 schools and medium risk asbestos from 1,200 schools (Planned Removal Program)
- demolition of 100 school buildings with high levels of asbestos, and replacing them with permanent modular buildings (Modular Buildings Program)

- respond to asbestos emergencies through a 24 hour, seven-day a week service that makes the incident areas safe so that schools can continue to operate (Incident Response Program).

The removal of high-risk asbestos containing material from 497 schools was completed by Class A asbestos removalists under the supervision of occupational hygienists. The program has moved to the next phase, targeting medium risk asbestos in 1,200 school sites.

To undertake this increased volume of work, the VSBA has recently established a panel of 19 Class A removalists.

The VSBA has also established policies above regulatory requirements to ensure the safety of students, staff and community members. These include:

- use of only Class A removalists for all removal works, even for medium-risk asbestos which are non-friable in case friable material is encountered during works
- asbestos removal to be only undertaken outside of school hours, when no extra-curricular activities are taking place
- air monitoring is required in addition to visual clearance prior to students reoccupying schools.

Results

The VBSA:

- completed an audit of 1,712 school sites with asbestos identified and rated according to risk level
- completed the removal of identified high-risk asbestos from 497 schools
- completed the removal of identified asbestos that may pose a risk in the future at 316 schools (as of 1 September 2018)
- provided comprehensive training to school staff including principals and asbestos coordinators
- a 24-hour asbestos help desk was established to register an asbestos incident, obtain advice and get further information.

Outcomes

In recent years the Department of Education and Training has raised the awareness of asbestos management within school communities through the enhancement of training programs.

Next steps

The planned removal of asbestos from schools will continue to 2020.

In addition, asbestos is being removed through the demolition and replacement of school buildings with modular buildings (Modular Buildings Program). To date, the Victorian Government has funded 50 projects³.

More information

<https://www.schoolbuildings.vic.gov.au/Pages/Asbestos-removal-from-schools.aspx>

<https://www.schoolbuildings.vic.gov.au/Pages/Permanent-Modular-School-Buildings-Program.aspx>