

## INFORMATION SHEET

### Asbestos in natural stone products

#### **Purpose**

This information sheet provides information about the potential presence of naturally occurring asbestos (NOA) in some natural stone products (not engineered stone) that are marketed under various names including as 'marble' or that contain marble fragments. The information provided is of relevance to importers, stone and tile industry workers, domestic suppliers and customers buying stone products.

#### **Background**

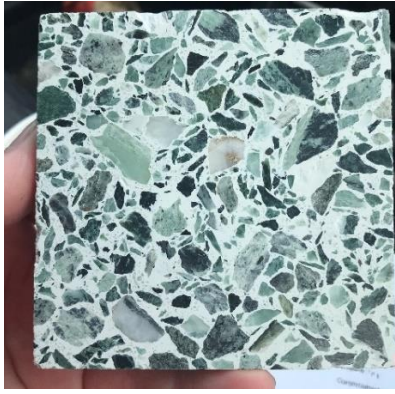
Asbestos means the asbestiform varieties of mineral silicates belonging to the serpentine or amphibole groups of rock forming minerals including actinolite asbestos, grunerite (or amosite) asbestos, anthophyllite asbestos, chrysotile asbestos, crocidolite asbestos or tremolite asbestos.

Certain rocks may contain NOA due to specific chemical composition and geological processes in the environment in which they have formed. Some examples are marbles and serpentinites, including some green marbles marketed with the name 'Verde' which have a serpentinite mineral content. Some examples of common, typically benign minerals that are often associated (in the same rock) with NOA minerals are dolomite, talc, calcite, lizardite and antigorite.

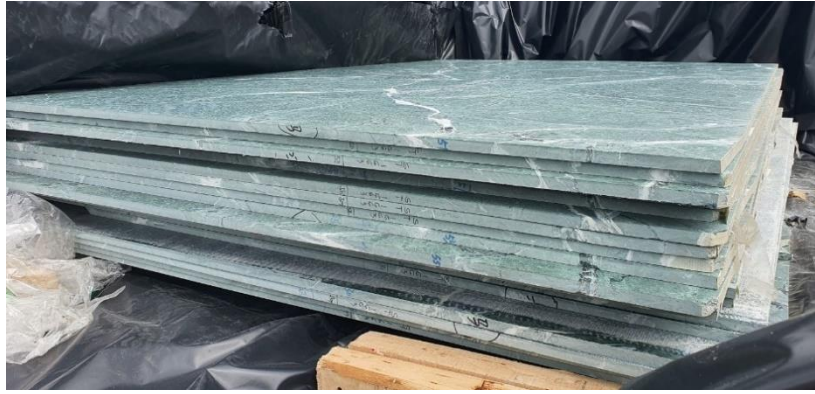
Rocks and minerals with a heightened risk of containing NOA can originate in Australia or anywhere around the world. Some imported stone products derived from these risk rocks and minerals may not have been subject to a level of scrutiny for asbestos at the source, in comparison to that which would occur in Australia. The risk of asbestos content in a stone material or product will often align to the occurrence of NOA in the location the stone is quarried. The quantity of NOA may vary in the same section of cut stone or throughout a batch, from little or no detectable trace, to significant and easily visible amounts. Sometimes this means testing multiple representative samples to ensure asbestos is detected if it is present. A low level present does not always mean a low risk for exposure, particularly if the stone is to be subject to stonemasonry work such as cutting, polishing or grinding.

#### **Product description**

Products of concern may include cut slabs, cut tiles and terrazzo style products with rock fragments. Uses may include dimension stone, internal fittings such as benchtops, wall and floor tiles or using contaminated fragments which are mixed into a composite cement binder for wet-laying of terrazzo style flooring on site.



**Figure 1:** Italian made terrazzo with fragments of 'Verde' stone found to contain low-level asbestos



**Figure 2:** Imported marble slabs from China described as China Jade Green found to contain asbestos  
(Image courtesy of Advanced Deconstruction)

### **The risk of disturbing the NOA**

Mechanical process such as honing, cutting or grinding of NOA in the stone releases asbestos fibres into the air. Rough handling during transport, that causes damage, can also release asbestos fibres. This presents an exposure risk to those in the immediate environment who come into contact with airborne fibres, or fibres that settle in the workplace.

### **Workplace Health and Safety prohibitions on asbestos**

Every WHS Regulator across Australia enforces prohibitions on the use (including installation) of materials that contain asbestos, such as stone products containing asbestos. The level of risk does not impact on these prohibitions – they are outright prohibitions with-out any reference to, or consideration of a minimum asbestos content.

Testing that is undertaken to confirm a product contains no asbestos needs to be specific to the product in question, and the results available on request to demonstrate that assurance.

### **NOA in imported natural stone products**

A trace level of asbestos in a product does not alter the fact that asbestos is present. The unlawful importation of goods containing asbestos, which includes NOA in stone products, is prohibited.

In some countries trace level of NOA is not controlled, as it is not intentionally added, like in some manufactured goods. Stone products with trace levels of NOA may be lawful to export from these countries. The import prohibition is enforced by the Australian Border Force (ABF) based on whether asbestos (as a prohibited import) is found to be unlawfully present in goods, not on the perceived direct risk to the end-user.

Knowingly importing asbestos containing stone products for modification in Australia, even with trace levels, would be regarded as a serious offence under Customs and Workplace Health and Safety (WHS) laws.

Cut stone slabs and tiles are not classified as 'raw materials' for the purposes of importation. These goods do not, therefore, meet the import exception for raw materials with naturally occurring traces of asbestos. See the [ABF website](#) for further information.

Importers, whether private or commercial, must ensure they do not import asbestos into Australia. They need to be aware of the varying definitions and standards applied to asbestos in the country of origin and/or supply. They must ensure they receive adequate evidence from the supplier that asbestos is not present. Importers advised by suppliers that a product 'potentially contains asbestos, but is below the level of quantification' should avoid importing the product altogether. Foreign trading companies that are not directly connected with the quarry or mine site may not be able to provide adequate documentary evidence to demonstrate there is no asbestos in the product, particularly if they are supplying stone originating from a range of countries.

When a risk is identified at the border, the ABF will require assurance from the importer, in the form of documentary evidence, that the goods do not contain asbestos. A declaration of no asbestos from the overseas supplier, on its own, is not acceptable evidence. It is reasonable to expect that an experienced organisation operating marble quarries should have an awareness of asbestos risks, and be able to provide evidence of their risk management for asbestos. If adequate assurance is not provided, importers will face delays and be responsible for costs incurred when the goods are held at the border for the purposes of sampling and testing. See the [ABF website](#) for further information.



**Figure 3:** Imported cut stone tiles from India described as Bidasar Green and Bidasar Brown 'marble' found to contain asbestos.



**Figure 4:** Close-up of area where sample was collected from one tile.

### **Addressing the risk of NOA in imported stone, what needs to be done?**

- Identify whether the imported stone of choice is a risk for NOA – consulting with an experienced person, such as a geologist with knowledge of these type of minerals, would assist this process.
- Obtain credible information from the supplier, back to the quarry source.
- Inspection by an appropriately qualified and/or licensed professional who can advise on how to assess and which methods of examination or analysis are required to achieve assurance.
- Professional sampling and accredited testing to scientifically identify the presence of any asbestiform asbestos minerals. This can be achieved before importation if to Australian requirements.

All participants in the supply chain need to maintain an awareness of the potential risk for asbestos content that some stone products and materials pose to workers and end-users. The awareness needs to be embedded in supply chain processes that include adequate consultation and risk management. Addressing the risks will prevent potential exposures to workers and customers and assist to prevent delays to the clearance of goods across the border. Responsibility for not addressing the risks might result in corrective action (including voluntary recalls) at significant financial impact to a business.

Identification of asbestos must be achieved by testing samples in a laboratory appropriately accredited for asbestos analysis. The sampling process should be undertaken by a professional with experience and qualifications who can determine the suspect area from which to sample. Inspection by an appropriately qualified and/or licensed professional might result in a determination that sampling and testing is not required – this position should be supported by a written statement setting out their conclusion and the reasons for this. The identification process needs to also consider the various types of asbestos that may be present, as this will determine the testing method needed to identify asbestos in the stone product.

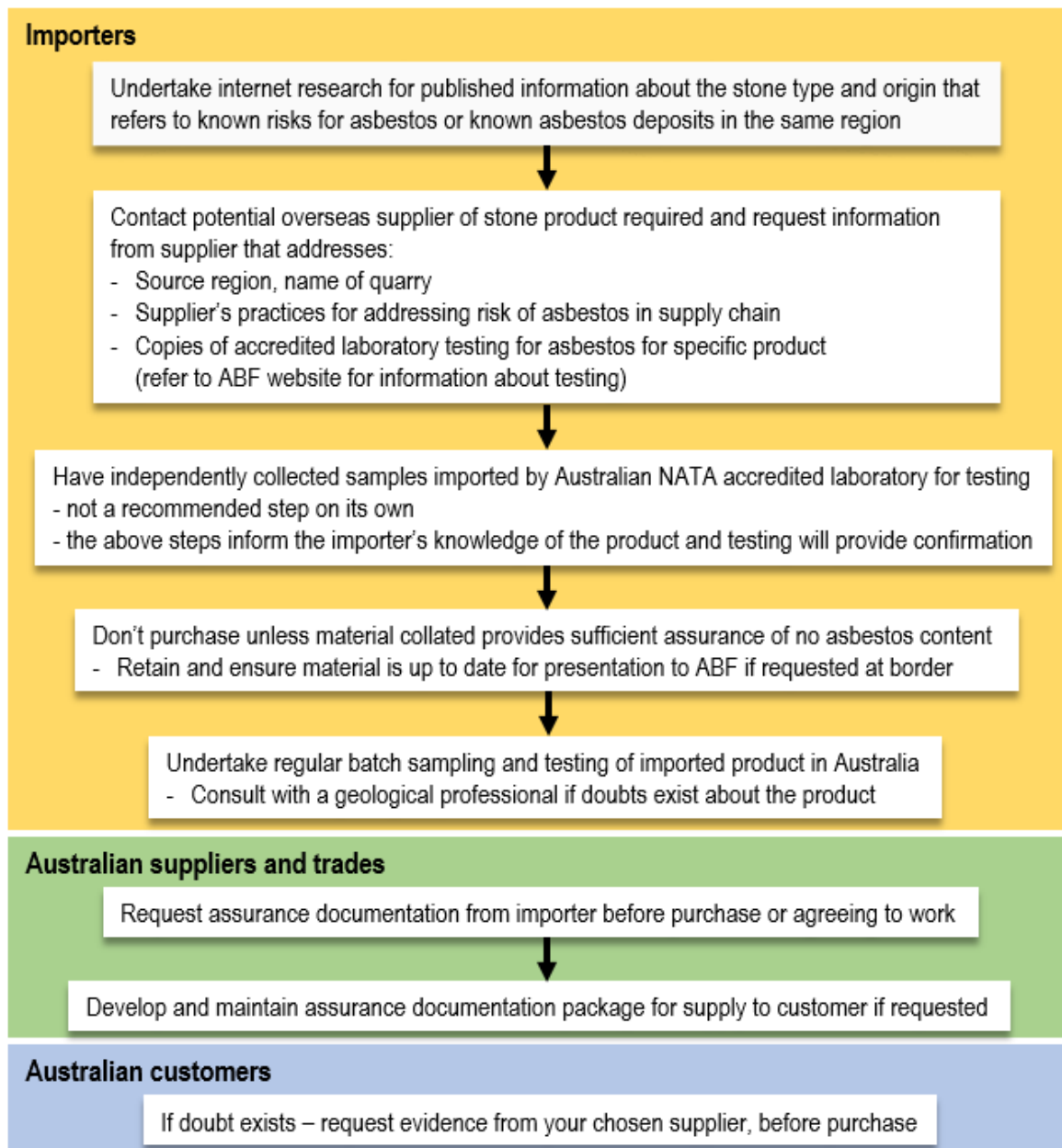
If any doubt remains, sampling needs to be undertaken, or the material or product must be assumed to contain asbestos. If the product is in Australia, an appropriate asbestos professional needs to be consulted as in some cases, an asbestos management plan might be required under WHS laws.

### Where do I get advice?

If unsure what to do, contact your State/Territory/Commonwealth WHS regulator:

Jurisdiction	Regulator	Contact Details	Website
ACT	WorkSafe ACT	13 22 81	<a href="http://www.worksafe.act.gov.au">www.worksafe.act.gov.au</a>
Cth	Comcare	1300 366 979	<a href="http://www.comcare.gov.au/">www.comcare.gov.au/</a>
NSW	SafeWork NSW	13 10 50	<a href="http://www.safework.nsw.gov.au">www.safework.nsw.gov.au</a>
NSW	NSW Gov Asbestos page	13 10 50	<a href="http://www.asbestos.nsw.gov.au">www.asbestos.nsw.gov.au</a>
Qld	Workplace Health and Safety Qld	1300 362 128	<a href="http://www.worksafe.qld.gov.au">www.worksafe.qld.gov.au</a>
Qld	Qld Gov Asbestos page	13 74 68	<a href="http://www.asbestos.qld.gov.au">www.asbestos.qld.gov.au</a>
NT	NT WorkSafe	1800 019 115	<a href="http://www.worksafe.nt.gov.au">www.worksafe.nt.gov.au</a>
NT	NT Gov Asbestos page	1800 019 115	<a href="http://www.asbestos.nt.gov.au">www.asbestos.nt.gov.au</a>
NZ	WorkSafe NZ	+64 0800 030 040	<a href="http://www.worksafe.govt.nz">www.worksafe.govt.nz</a>
SA	SafeWork SA	1300 365 255	<a href="http://www.safework.sa.gov.au">www.safework.sa.gov.au</a>
SA	SA Gov Asbestos page	1300 365 255	<a href="http://www.asbestos.sa.gov.au">www.asbestos.sa.gov.au</a>
TAS	WorkSafe TAS	1300 366 322	<a href="http://www.worksafe.tas.gov.au">www.worksafe.tas.gov.au</a>
Vic	WorkSafe VIC	1800 136 089	<a href="http://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au">www.worksafe.vic.gov.au</a>
Vic	Vic Gov Asbestos page	1800 136 089	<a href="http://www.asbestos.vic.gov.au">www.asbestos.vic.gov.au</a>
WA	WorkSafe WA	1300 307 877	<a href="http://www.commerce.wa.gov.au/WorkSafe">www.commerce.wa.gov.au/WorkSafe</a>

## Steps to consider – addressing the risk of asbestos in imported stone products



**Do not assess risk on the level of exposure to the end-user.**

**The primary consideration is whether asbestos is present or not.**

This diagram is a short summary of information. *Read the guidance material first.*

It is intended as a guide, and not as a strict procedure or legal advice.

Discussion with an appropriate asbestos professional will inform this process.

This information sheet has been developed by the Heads of Workplace Safety Authorities (HWSA) Imported Materials with Asbestos Working Group (IMAWG), whose membership comprises representatives from: SafeWork NSW, SafeWork SA, NT WorkSafe, Workplace Health and Safety Queensland, WorkSafe ACT, WorkSafe Tasmania, WorkSafe Victoria, WorkSafe WA, Australian Border Force, Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency, Australian Government Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, Australian Competition & Consumer Commission, Comcare, and Safe Work Australia.