

Asbestos in educational mineral sample kits and stones sold separately

Purpose

This safety alert provides information about the potential presence of asbestos in mineral samples and stones that are contained in some “mineral sample kits” and also sold individually. These items have been purchased by schools or private individuals throughout Australia and continue to be available for sale online.

Background

Some mineral kits have been found to contain rocks with naturally occurring asbestos under a variety of names, including serpentine, amosite, tremolite and chrysotile, occasionally referred to by the name of leucotile. Older mineral kits (dating from the 1970s) produced by the former Geological Specimen Supplies company may also contain asbestos. The "Lustre" mineral kits may include crocidolite (blue) asbestos as an example of fibrous lustre.

Individual stones that are sold separately may also contain asbestos, for example some have been sold under the title of ‘Serpentine Stone’, that have subsequently been found to contain asbestos.

Kits which contain any of the samples listed in Table 1 and individual stones that have been purchased separately with these sample names, should be treated as containing asbestos or other hazardous mineral fibres and withdrawn from use.

Product description

Generally, a box with separated sections containing individual specimens of rocks and minerals. Kits of risk include those of older Australian origin (prior to 2011) and some imported kits.



Figure 1: Older mineral kit containing samples of serpentine and leucotile



Figure 2: Online mineral kit containing samples of asbestos and serpentine

Asbestos in imported products

While asbestos has been prohibited in Australia since December 2003, in some countries it is still used in manufactured products. The importation, manufacture, supply, sale and use or reuse of asbestos and asbestos-containing products is not permitted, except under very limited circumstances. Some supplier countries may classify goods with low levels of asbestos as ‘asbestos-free’. In Australia, any level of asbestos is prohibited for import or use.

Risk control

- Individual stones, or kits containing the geological samples listed in Table 1, should be treated as containing asbestos or other hazardous mineral fibres and not be purchased.

Table 1: Sample names used by supplier’s that are not to be purchased.

Prohibited Asbestos Minerals
• Chrysotile (leucotile/white asbestos/chrysotile serpentine)
• Anthophyllite
• Crocidolite (Blue asbestos/Riebeckite)
• Amosite (grunerite)
• Actinolite
• Tremolite
Serpentine or serpentinite (including Lizardite and antigorite serpentines)
Amphibole (sometimes incorrectly used as a mineral name) Note: Amphiboles are a mineral group, five of which are asbestos minerals. Not all amphiboles are asbestos minerals. Confirm with supplier.
Fibrous zeolite including erionite and offretite
Richterite
Winchite

- A pre-purchase check should be undertaken for all mineral, geological and ore kits or samples such as those listed in Table 2.

Table 2: Mineral, geological and ore kits that could contain asbestos and warrant a pre-purchase check

Igneous, metamorphic and sedimentary rock and mineral kits	Fluorescence and phosphorescence kits
Crystal habit kits	Streak kits
Lustre kits	Specific gravity kits
(Moh’s) Hardness kits	Individual geological specimens
Cleavage kits	

- When purchasing mineral sample kits, obtain a list of the samples in the kit and confirm the country of origin before going ahead with the purchase. Where the kits are assembled may not be where they are delivered from.
- Mineral sample kits that are professionally assembled in Australia are more likely to not contain asbestos. Sources such as reputable Australian educational materials suppliers or a geological society are likely to be more reliable than a ‘healing stone’ supplier or online seller who stocks multiple different commodities.

- Some online purchases from sellers said to be based in Australia may result in an importation from an overseas supplier sent directly to the purchaser. The seller may merely arrange for the supply and not sight the goods.
- In any case, obtain the supplier's written confirmation that there are no asbestos minerals in the kit.

Action required if in possession of a mineral sample kit or other mineral samples

- Examine the labelling in comparison to table 1 above to establish whether any suspect samples are present. The list contains the names of the six prohibited asbestos minerals, as well as other mineral names used which may be of risk for the presence of asbestos minerals.
- Suspect samples should not be handled but left in-situ. The entire kit should be appropriately disposed of. Schools should undertake handling and disposal in line with guidance from the relevant education department's work, health and safety guidelines for asbestos.
- If a consumer wishes to dispose of items they believe may contain asbestos, they should take it to a licensed facility that handles hazardous waste. Further information on the disposal of asbestos waste may be obtained from local government authorities, the relevant environmental protection authority or waste disposal authority in your state or territory. See page 3.

Mineral Talc

Mineral talc and asbestos minerals can sometimes geologically occur together, as it can with other minerals. An appropriately sourced and assembled kit from a reputable supplier should not contain asbestos contaminated talc samples. The risk of asbestos contamination from this source is assessed as very low.

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

This Alert 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.