

Asbestos in imported prefabricated building products

Purpose

This information sheet addresses an increase in importations of prefabricated buildings containing asbestos into the Australian housing and construction market and the risk for materials used in their construction. The information provided is of relevance to importers, licensed customs brokers, freight forwarders, domestic suppliers, hire operators and consumers. State and federal authorities providing incentives to consumers to purchase prefabricated buildings or contemplating the supply of modular housing for disaster recovery operations should also have risk assessment processes in place to mitigate this risk within their scope of governance.

Background

The Australian Border Force (ABF) has recently observed an increase of importations of prefabricated buildings into Australia. ABF examinations at the border have detected building materials containing asbestos within some of these prefabricated structures, preventing their entry into Australia. Importers of these products need to remain vigilant, undertake adequate supply chain risk management processes for asbestos and ensure they obtain valid documentary evidence of no asbestos content.

Product Description

Detections of chrysotile asbestos have been identified in prefabricated buildings structures including, but not limited to flooring, panel insulation and fibre cement sheeting (also known as fibre board, composite board and density board). Examples are depicted in the following images with chrysotile asbestos detected in the materials arrowed.

Figure 1: Interior compressed fibre cement flooring



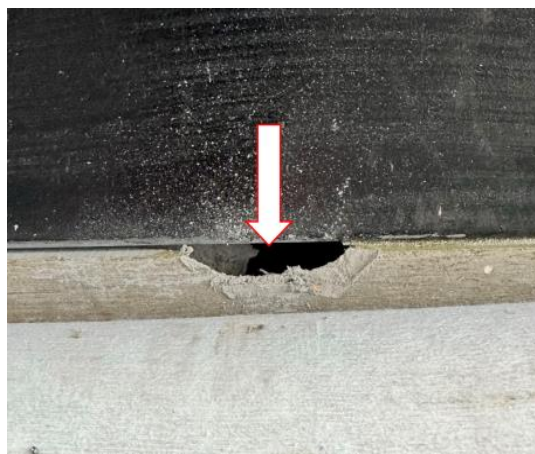
Figure 2: Panel insulation



Figure 3: Floor backing



Figure 4: Floor lining



Imported prefabricated structures of risk

Modular (including container) homes and offices, tiny homes, demountable accommodation and amenity units, caravan park-type cabins, switch room enclosures, prefabricated modules for developments (such as bathrooms), mobile vending vans and prefabricated kits for assembly.

Asbestos in imported products

While asbestos has been prohibited in Australia since December 2003, in some countries it is still used in manufactured products. Importers, whether private or commercial, must ensure they do not import asbestos into Australia.

Addressing the risk of asbestos in importations of prefabricated housing

Significant information and guidance are available at <https://www.abf.gov.au/asbestos> to assist importers in understanding their obligations and requirements to comply with the import prohibition for asbestos, including further images of these type of border detections.

When the ABF identifies risk goods for asbestos, the importer will be directed to provide assurance, in the form of appropriate documentary evidence, that the goods do not contain asbestos. A valid test report from a NATA accredited laboratory (or equivalent international laboratory) for representative samples of the structure, which show no asbestos detected, is the best form of assurance.

A declaration of no asbestos from the overseas supplier, on its own, is not acceptable evidence. 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. Detection of asbestos onshore will result in further costs to the Importer to ensure the safe removal and destruction of the asbestos containing components. See the ABF website for further information.

Risk Control

The ABF actively monitors the risk of asbestos in prefabricated buildings at the border. Building products and materials containing asbestos pose an unacceptable health risk to workers and end-users.

Importers and those involved in the supply chain can proactively help to prevent unlawful importations of asbestos into Australia by:

- Familiarising themselves with the resources provided at the ABF website about managing the risk of asbestos, before purchasing from suppliers outside Australia.
- Staying aware of risk indicators such as:
 - countries of manufacture that allow the lawful use of asbestos
 - advertising with general descriptions like ‘mineral fibres’ with no further detail.
- Obtaining credible documentary evidence of no asbestos use in manufacturing, whether intentional or through contaminated raw materials, from suppliers outside Australia.
- Undertaking supply chain risk management through the use of independent sampling and accredited testing of risk goods at a NATA accredited laboratory (or equivalent valid international laboratory) from which test reports will be acceptable to the ABF.

Knowingly importing asbestos containing products to Australia, with an intent to supply, are serious offences under Customs and Workplace Health and Safety (WHS) laws. Importers must know the goods they are importing and ensure they do not contain asbestos.

Action Required

Persons in possession of the affected building materials or suspect they have supplied then in Australia, should contact their local Work Health Safety (WHS) regulator for advice. Contact details are provided in the table below. Suspected structures should not be cut, drilled or dismantled until confirmed as not containing asbestos.

Where do I get advice?

Australian Border Force Website: <https://www.abf.gov.au/asbestos>

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 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.