

Frequently Asked Questions for Renovators and Homeowners
<http://www.nsw.gov.au/fibro-and-asbestos-frequently-asked-questions>

What is asbestos?

Asbestos is the generic term for a number of fibrous silicate minerals. Products made from asbestos cement - bonded asbestos material - include fibro sheeting (flat and corrugated) as well as water, drainage and flue pipes, roofing shingles and guttering.

Only fibro products made before 1987 contain asbestos. In NSW, for example, the use of asbestos was discontinued in fibro sheets by 1982, in corrugated sheets by 1984 and in all other products by 1986. The manufacture and use of asbestos products was banned nationally from 31 December 2003.

How can asbestos affect my health?

Breathing in asbestos fibres can cause asbestosis, lung cancer and mesothelioma. The risk of contracting these diseases increases with the number of fibres inhaled and the risk of lung cancer from inhaling asbestos fibres is also greater if you smoke. People who get health problems from inhaling asbestos have usually been exposed to high levels of asbestos for a long time. The symptoms of these diseases do not usually appear until about 20 to 30 years after the first exposure to asbestos.

What are the health risks for renovators?

Most people are exposed to very small amounts of asbestos as they go about their daily lives and do not develop asbestos-related health problems. Finding that your home or workplace is made from fibro products does not mean your health is at risk. Studies have shown that these products, if in sound condition and left undisturbed, are not a significant health risk. If the asbestos fibres remain firmly bound in cement, generally you do not need to remove the fibro or even coat it.

Health problems can occur when people are unaware of the hazards of working with fibro and do not take appropriate precautions. The important point is to always work to avoid or minimise the release of dust or small particles from asbestos material. If you use commonsense and follow basic safety guidelines, working with fibro products should not be a problem.

How do I know if my fibro contains asbestos?

The most accurate way to find out if your fibro contains asbestos is to have a licensed asbestos removal contractor inspect and test it. You can't tell by looking at it. If in doubt, assume asbestos is present and take the necessary precautions.

How do I find a contractor?

For a listing of licensed asbestos removal contractors in your area, refer to your local telephone directory or the Yellow Pages.

How do I check if a contractor is licensed?

WorkCover NSW's Asbestos & Demolition Unit can provide license checks on asbestos and demolition contractors. Contact the Asbestos and Demolition Unit on (02) 8260 5885 . For areas out side of the CBD or for further information, contact WorkCover Assistance Service on 13 10 50.

Where can I get a guide to asbestos removal?

WorkCover NSW has a guideline on asbestos removal. Contact the WorkCover Assistance Service on 13 10 50 for a copy or visit www.workcover.nsw.gov.au and download a copy of the publication.

If I want to demolish a shed or building lined with fibro, what do I need to do?

If you use a contractor to assist you and the area of bonded asbestos sheeting (fibro) is over 10 square metres, then you need to have it removed by a licensed asbestos removal contractor. If under this amount, then a license is not required.

How do I remove asbestos in a safe manner?

If fibro sheeting:

- Do not use power tools. Asbestos fibres can be released if power tools are used for anything other than the removal of screws.
- Wear an Australian Standards Protection Level 2 (P2) minimum half face disposable mask and disposable coveralls. These are generally available from hardware suppliers. Non-Australian Standards certified masks should not be used where asbestos is present.
- Wet sheets down to reduce dust generation and movement.
- Take the sheets off whole (again, do not use power tools as this may create dust movement).
- Seal sheets in construction grade plastic. (This should be 200 microns thick.)
- Contact your Local Council for a licensed disposal point in your area. Waste Service NSW on (02) 9934 7000 will be able to help if you live in the Sydney metropolitan area. Contact the NSW Department of Environment and Conservation Pollution Line on 13 15 55 for information on legally transporting and disposing of asbestos waste.

Should the asbestos be in powder form or can be crumbled, pulverized or reduced to powder by hand pressure when dry, then an asbestos removal contractor with an AS1 Licence is required for its removal.

WorkCover NSW has a guideline on asbestos removal. Contact the WorkCover Assistance Service on 13 10 50 for a copy or visit www.workcover.nsw.gov.au and download a copy of the publication.

Where do I dispose of asbestos sheeting?

Contact your Local Council for a licensed disposal point in your area. Waste Service NSW on (02) 9934 7000 will also be able to help if you live in the Sydney metropolitan area. Contact the NSW Department of Environment and Conservation Pollution Line on 13 15 55 for information on legally transporting and disposing of asbestos waste.

I have concerns about the neighbours (or a contractor working for them) taking down a shed or demolishing a house and the dust generated. Are they doing it safely?

Your neighbour, or their contractor, should be:

- wearing personal protective equipment
- taking the sheets off whole and not using power tools to minimise dust
- not working on windy days
- wetting down the sheets
- putting them in a plastic-lined skip.

If you are worried that they are not doing things safely, contact your Local Council. WorkCover NSW does not have jurisdiction over asbestos removal being performed by individual homeowners on the residential property in which they are living. They should remove asbestos sheeting in line with the guidelines provided by WorkCover to ensure a safe approach to asbestos removal.

WorkCover NSW does have jurisdiction over contractors and commercial ventures should asbestos removal be performed in an unsafe manner. Contact the WorkCover Assistance Service on 13 10 50 to report an unsafe situation.

How do I know if my neighbour's fibro shed or other building has asbestos in it?

Any inquiries for analysis of suspected asbestos should be directed to NATA - The National Association of Testing Authorities. For a NATA Lab List call (02) 9736 8222 or refer to their website at www.nata.asn.au.

OR

Contact a consultant in occupational hygiene who deals with asbestos issues. The Australian Institute of Occupational Hygienists has a list of consultants in occupational hygiene on its website at www.aioh.org.au. You can also call the institute on (03) 9335 2577 for further information.

I may have been exposed to asbestos. My skin and eyes are irritated, what can I do?

Asbestos does not irritate skin or eyes. It is purely a respiratory problem. However, if you are worried about respiratory damage, you can contact your own doctor or the Dust Diseases Board on (02) 8223 6600 or 1800 550 027.