



General Information on Asbestos

What is asbestos?

Asbestos is a naturally occurring mineral fibre mined from the earth and used extensively in building materials prior to 1988. Asbestos is a versatile product, which withstands heat, erosion and decay, and has fire and water resistant properties.

The use of all forms of asbestos has been banned nationally since 31 December 2003.

Background

You need to be aware that commercial, government and residential buildings constructed before 1988 are likely to include materials containing asbestos e.g. lining under eaves; walls in wet areas (laundries, toilets and bathrooms) and electrical meter boards.

Other materials which may contain asbestos that may be found around community facilities are roof sheeting, vinyl tiles and underlay to vinyl sheet floors.

These materials do not pose a risk to health if they are maintained in good condition and you leave them alone.

The risks occur when they are disturbed or damaged during repair, renovation and demolition work.

What are the health risks associated with asbestos?

All types of asbestos can break into fibres so small they can only be seen with a microscope. They are often so small that once they get into the air, they remain airborne and can be inhaled into the lungs, making it difficult for the body to remove them.

Asbestos is only a risk to health if asbestos fibres are released into the air and breathed in. In some people, this may lead to asbestos-related diseases. These are mainly cancers of the lungs, cancers of the chest lining (mesothelioma) and asbestosis, which is a non-cancerous condition.

Generally speaking, the lower the level of exposure to asbestos, the lower the risk to health. Therefore, the aim should be to prevent any exposure at all.

Diseases caused by asbestos may not become evident for up to 50 years and there is no known cure. Research has shown that smoking significantly increases the risk of lung cancer in people who have been exposed to asbestos.

Materials containing asbestos that crumble easily if handled, or are sawn, drilled or sanded into a powder are more likely to create a health hazard.



These materials do not pose a risk if left undisturbed and in good condition. Millions of people live with asbestos every day without harm to their health.

For more information see *Fact sheet – health risks*.

Who is currently at risk of being exposed to asbestos?

The people most likely to be currently exposed to asbestos are those working in the building and maintenance trades, and, to a lesser extent, those involved in asbestos removal (where risks potentially exist unless rigorous precautions are taken). Home renovators also need to be aware of the risks associated with disturbing or damaging materials containing asbestos.

For more information visit www.asbestos.act.gov.au

What are the new asbestos laws?

New laws have been introduced to help raise public awareness about materials containing asbestos, promote better management of these materials and help reduce the future incidence of asbestos-related diseases.

When did the new laws take effect?

The new laws came into effect on 4 April 2005.

From 4 April 2005:

Owners and occupiers (including people renting or leasing who repair and maintain the premises) of premises need to give:

- tenants and prospective tenants
- prospective buyers
- persons doing relevant work at the premises (e.g. construction, renovation, installation or alteration).

information, in writing, on what they know about asbestos at the premises.

To help you provide the information there is a simple form, *Managing Asbestos: Advisory Form* available at Canberra Connect Shopfronts or on the website www.asbestos.act.gov.au

The Department of Disability Housing and Community Services sent an Asbestos Advisory Form to all lessees of its facilities and centres on 4 April 2005.

As more information about the presence of materials that may contain asbestos becomes available



updated Advisory Forms will be issued.

Where can I get more information?

A booklet – *Managing asbestos: A guide for householders* – was mailed to all homes in the ACT in mid March 2005. Another booklet *Managing asbestos in commercial premises* was also mailed to all commercial and community buildings in mid March 2005.

There are a number of additional booklets available that give you more information about managing materials containing asbestos. They include:

- *Managing asbestos: A guide for home renovators*
- *Managing asbestos: A guide for tradespeople*

These guides are available at:

Canberra Connect Shopfronts in Civic, Woden, Belconnen and Tuggeranong and ACT Government libraries.

The guides are also available on line at www.asbestos.act.gov.au. The website contains a Frequently Asked Questions section which may address other questions about asbestos and how to manage it.

If you have further inquiries on the management of asbestos in community facilities, you can contact the Facilities Manager on 62071053.

If you have general inquiries on the management of asbestos, you can contact Canberra Connect on **132 281**

Fact Sheets Available:

Fact Sheet for Managers of Community Centres

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