



FIBRO & ASBESTOS

A RENOVATOR AND HOMEOWNER'S GUIDE



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Does your fibro contain 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.

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 product was banned nationally from 31 December 2003.

What else is made of asbestos cement?

Products made from asbestos cement not only include fibro sheeting (flat and corrugated), but items such as water, drainage and flue pipes, roofing shingles and guttering.

What are the risks?

Breathing in asbestos fibres can cause asbestosis, lung cancer and mesothelioma. This does not automatically mean that your health is at risk if you find that your home or workplace is made from fibro products. 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 a solid cement sheet or structure, generally you do not need to remove the fibro or even coat it.

Health problems usually occur when people are unaware of the hazards of working with fibro. The important point is to always work so there's minimal release of dust or small particles from asbestos material. If you use commonsense and follow safety guidelines, working with fibro products should not be a problem.

Safety checklist:

- **Do not use power tools.** Asbestos fibres can be released if power tools are used for anything other than the removal of screws.
- **Do not waterblast or scrub with a stiff broom or brush.** It is illegal to waterblast asbestos-cement sheets. If the material has been accidentally waterblasted or has suddenly deteriorated in some way, you should call a licensed asbestos removal contractor.
- **Wet gently with water.** When removing fibro sheets, wet gently with water, whenever possible, to minimise any release of fibres. Remember do not waterblast. Be careful when on roofs, as asbestos sheets are brittle and slippery when wet.
- **Avoid drilling and cutting into asbestos products.** Do not drill holes through eaves, flues or vents, as these may also be asbestos products. Never cut into a fibro sheet. Instead remove the entire sheet and replace it with a non-asbestos product.
- **Let people know.** Talk it over with those who may be affected by the removal and disposal of your fibro, such as neighbours.
- **Cover up.** You should wear disposable overalls and an appropriate dust mask if you are working with asbestos products. Make sure your mask has two straps to hold it firmly in place. Don't use masks that only have one.
- **Don't drop fibro sheets.** Remove asbestos sheets carefully. Lower, don't drop them to the ground with minimum breakage.

Cleaning up

- **Stack and wrap.** Stack fibro sheets carefully on ground sheets, wrap into bundles for disposal or place directly into bins that have been prelined with plastic sheeting. Cover the load before disposal.

- **No skidding.** When stacking sheets, do not skid one sheet over another, as this will cause release of fibres.
- **Remove immediately.** Do not leave sheets lying about where they may be further broken or crushed by people or vehicular traffic. Remove all asbestos waste as soon as you can.
- **Clean up everything.** Put used disposable overalls and masks in bags for removal with other asbestos wastes.

Safe disposal

Dispose of all asbestos waste promptly. For safety reasons always:

- **Dampen all asbestos waste** and wrap in plastic, or put in lined bins or vehicles. Do not put asbestos waste in domestic garbage bins or compactors because it is illegal to do so. Remove all asbestos waste from a site as soon as possible.
- **Dispose of asbestos waste** in a manner and at a site approved by your local council or the appropriate disposal authority. (See *Help and advice* section below). It is illegal to re-use asbestos products.

Other things to keep your eye on

Hail damage to your roof or any asbestos cement product can be as bad as waterblasting. Call a licensed asbestos removal contractor immediately if the hail was heavy. See *Help and advice* section below for contact numbers.

Watch for weathering. Surface weathering can lead to the release of asbestos fibres from roofs. Weathered asbestos products can release fibres when disturbed, such as in the removal of an asbestos roof or gutters.

Fire damage. Fire damaged property containing asbestos product could result in loose asbestos fibres due to intense heat. A licensed asbestos contractor must be used for cleaning up.

Keep guttering (and downpipes) in good repair. As asbestos fibres collect in gutters after heavy rain, guttering and downpipes should be in good repair on buildings with asbestos roofing. Downpipes should not run into garden beds. Wet clean and seal roof gutters before removing them.

What about insulation? Insulation materials in house roof spaces are usually fibreglass, rockwool, paper or foam. Very few houses in NSW have loose asbestos insulation in the roof space.

When to coat asbestos products

Coating fibro products is not recommended. You should only coat fibro products if they're in sound condition and then only to waterproof them. **Do not waterblast fibro.**

Remember:

Risks associated with installed, undisturbed asbestos products are small. Even weathered asbestos roofing does not release many airborne fibres unless the material is either disturbed or handled in a way that promotes the release of fibres.

Coating is not considered necessary on health grounds. Surface coatings, however, can extend the life of asbestos products and may improve their appearance. Special sealants only should be used on asbestos material, as ordinary paints do not bond well to the surface of weathered asbestos cement products. Seek professional advice and use a professional painter, where possible.

Check if your asbestos roofing needs to be replaced. Roofing that has weathered to the point where it is structurally unsound and no longer waterproof should be replaced.

If you decide to coat your roof, put planks down so that people do not have to walk directly on the roof. Use a fall protection system to prevent persons falling from the roof edge or through the roof.

Wear dust masks and overalls when working.

HELP AND ADVICE

For more information visit the NSW Government website at **www.nsw.gov.au**.

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

For advice on the transport and disposal of asbestos products in NSW, contact the Department of Environment and Conservation Pollution Line on 13 15 55 or your local council.

For advice on working with asbestos or fibro or who can be contracted to remove it contact the WorkCover Assistance Service on 13 10 50 or visit the WorkCover website at **www.workcover.nsw.gov.au**.