



LIVING WITH **FIBRO**

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WORKCOVER NSW HEALTH AND SAFETY NOTES

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Does your fibro contain asbestos?

The most accurate way to find out if your fibro contains asbestos is for experienced people to 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 in fibro sheets was discontinued by 1982, in corrugated sheets by 1984 and in all other products by 1986.

What are the risks?

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 show that these products, if left undisturbed, are not a significant health risk *provided the material is in reasonable condition*. If the asbestos fibres remain firmly bound in a solid cement matrix, 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. Use commonsense, follow safety guidelines and working with fibro products should not be a problem.

Safe work procedures

You do not need a licence to remove fibro from houses, but you should be familiar with asbestos regulations. Check what these are with your local council. Read the safety checklist below before you start working:

- **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.** It is illegal to waterblast asbestos cement products. If the material has been accidentally waterblasted, or has suddenly deteriorated in some way, you will need to call a licensed asbestos removal contractor.
- **wet gently with water if you need to.** If hand sanding fibro sheets before painting, wet gently with water 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 around the roof area.** Do not drill holes through eaves, flues or vents. 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 coveralls and an appropriate mask if you are in the working area. 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.

Cleaning up

- **stack and wrap.** Stack sheets carefully on ground sheets, wrap into bundles for disposal or place directly into disposable bins that have been prelined with some form of sturdy sheeting. Cover 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 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 all asbestos waste promptly. For safety always:

- **wet all asbestos waste** and wrap in plastic or put in lined bins or vehicles. Do not put asbestos waste in domestic garbage bins and compactors. 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](#). It is illegal to re-use asbestos sheets.

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](#) for contact numbers.
- **watch for weathering.** Surface weathering releases asbestos fibres from roofs. Weathered asbestos can be dangerous if airborne fibres are released when working, such as removing an asbestos roof or gutters.
- **other asbestos cement products.** These not only include fibro sheeting (flat and corrugated), but items such as water, drainage and flue pipes, roofing shingles and guttering.
- **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 roof gutters before removing them and wrap carefully.
- **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.

- **is tank water safe?** Tank water collected from asbestos cement roofing will contain some asbestos. Drinking this water does not present a significant health risk. You might consider however, replacing or coating your roof, or perhaps fitting a water filter to the kitchen tap.

When to coat asbestos products

Coating fibro products is not recommended. You should only quote fibro products if they're in sound condition and then only to waterproof them. Remember:

- **risks associated with installed, undisturbed asbestos products are small.** Even weathered asbestos roofing does not release much 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. Use a professional painter, where possible.
- **to check if your asbestos roofing (like all roofing) needs to be replaced.** Roofing that has weathered to the point where it is structurally unsound and no longer waterproof should be replaced. Use a registered asbestos removal contractor particularly when the area is greater than 200 square metres.
- **if you decide to coat your roof,** put planks down so that people do not have to walk directly on the roof.
- **wear full protective masks and overalls** when working.

Help and advice

For more information about working with asbestos cement products contact the Information Centre on 13 10 50.

For advice on the disposal of asbestos products in NSW, contact the NSW Environmental Protection Authority on 02 9795 5000 or your local council.

For contact number of licensed asbestos removal contractors, call the Information Centre or your local council.

Catalogue No. **315** Ordering Hotline **1300 799 003**



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