

# BELLINGEN SHIRE COUNCIL



## ASBESTOS INFORMATION

This information sheet has been developed to address the potentially serious health hazard posed during the demolition or removal of asbestos material.

The information aims to protect the health and safety of the community and site workers when carrying out demolition and building works involving asbestos production, by ensuring detection of asbestos prior to commencement of any development works and compliance with WorkCover requirements.

### **What is asbestos?**

Asbestos is the name given to a group of fibrous silicate minerals that occur naturally in the environment. It was commonly used in many building materials between the 1940's and late 1980's because of its durability, fire resistance and excellent insulating properties.

The presence of asbestos only poses a risk if it is:

- Broken
- In poor or deteriorated condition or
- Disturbed during activities that produce dust containing asbestos fibres.

### **Potential health hazards**

Asbestos fibres are made of very fine fibrils and can be a health risk if airborne, as inhalation is the main way fibres enter the body. However, small amounts of fibres may be present in the air all the time and are breathed by everyone without causing ill effects.

The risk of inhaling fibres depends on the product in which the asbestos is used. Fibres in a stable "matrix" material such as bonded in asbestos cement sheeting (fibro) are unlikely to become airborne.

Fibres are more likely to be released from non-bonded materials including sprayed on insulation and pipe lagging, especially if the product is damaged.

Inhalation of asbestos fibres brings a risk of asbestosis, lung cancer and mesothelioma.

Asbestos-related diseases have a delay period of 20 to 40 years between exposure, onset of symptoms and detection of the disease.

### **What does asbestos look like?**

It is often difficult to identify the presence of asbestos by eye. As a general rule, certain building materials installed before the late 1980's may contain asbestos. Only fibro products made before 1987 contain asbestos.

### **Where can asbestos be found in the home?**

Asbestos fibres may be found either firmly or loosely bound in a number of products once used in the Australian building industry.

#### **Bonded Asbestos ('non-friable' asbestos):**

Bonded asbestos material is any material that contains asbestos in a bonded matrix. It may consist of Portland cement or various resin/binders and cannot be crushed by hand when dry.

Asbestos cement products that may be found around the home include:

- Asbestos cement sheeting, flat or corrugated (commonly known as fibro)
- Water, drainage or flue pipes
- Roof shingles
- Imitation brick cladding.

Bonded asbestos products may be found in any home or building built between approximately the 1920's and 1987.

#### **Friable Asbestos:**

Friable asbestos material is any material that contains asbestos and is in the form of a powder or can be crumbled, pulverized or reduced to powder by hand pressure when dry.

Examples of friable products are:

- Ceiling insulation (mainly in commercial buildings)
- Millboard, pipe or boiler lagging
- Acoustic insulation and fire protective coatings

Any asbestos cement product, which has been subject to weathering, damage, hail or other mechanical action or inappropriately buried (not in accordance with environmental legislation) is considered friable asbestos material.

***An Asbestos Removal Contractor requires a WorkCover NSE AS1 Licence for the removal of friable type asbestos.***

### **What should I do if I find asbestos?**

If you are undertaking any demolition or renovation works you must ensure that you comply with all of WorkCover NSW requirements for handling or removing asbestos. Remember any damaged or broken asbestos must be removed as it poses a health hazard due to asbestos fibres being released.

Demolition, renovation and building works may require the consent of Council, therefore it is important to check with Council before commencing any demolition works or renovations.

### **Can I remove asbestos from my home myself?**

Currently under WorkCover NSW requirements, you do not need a licence to remove less than 10m<sup>2</sup> of bonded asbestos (i.e. fibro sheeting). However, as asbestos poses a potential public health risk it is important that relevant WorkCover and public safety requirements are complied with at all times during demolition, removal, packaging, transport and disposal.

#### **Note:**

Please refer to WorkCover NSW guidelines and publications for more detailed information on the removal and disposal of asbestos products. A detailed list of contacts and information sources are provided at the end of this information sheet.

It is illegal to put any asbestos material in domestic waste bins. Significant penalties apply under pollution control legislation, including issuing of 'on-the-spot' fines.

### **How do I find a suitable contractor?**

For a listing of asbestos removal contractors in your area, please refer to your local telephone directory or the Yellow pages. WorkCover NSW Certification Unit can also provide licence checks on asbestos and demolition contractors.

### **Enforcement**

Under the Protection of the Environment Operations Act (1997), Council may issue environment protection notices in relation to the handling, storage and disposal of asbestos products.

*Clean-up notices* may direct an occupier of premises at or from which Council reasonably suspects that a pollution incident has occurred, or a person reasonably suspected of causing or having caused pollution, to take clean-up action specified in the notice. This would include the unsatisfactory storage and or disposal of asbestos.

*Prevention notices* can be issued if the appropriate regulatory authority reasonably suspects that any activity has been or is being carried out in an environmentally unsatisfactory manner at any premises or by any person. Prevention notices require that action specified in the notice be taken. There is a right of appeal to the Land and Environment Court.

Fees are also payable to Council, for the issuing of clean-up and prevention notices (currently \$320).

Council may issue a notice directing the owner of a property to remove any damaged and broken asbestos for example, a damaged asbestos fence or broken fibro sheeting laying upon the premises.

Council is also able to issue various notices, orders or penalty infringements (on-the-spot fines) in relation to a range of regulatory matters and offences under the Local Government Act 1993 or Environmental Planning & Assessment Act 1979, including failing to comply with the conditions of development consent.

### **Further information**

If you have any concerns regarding asbestos removal works, please contact WorkCover NSW or Council's Health and Building Services, as detailed below:

- WorkCover NSW 13 10 50 [www.workcover.nsw.gov.au](http://www.workcover.nsw.gov.au)
- Bellingen Shire Council 6655 7300 [www.bellingen.nsw.gov.au](http://www.bellingen.nsw.gov.au)

### **Other Relevant Authorities**

- NSW Department of Environment, Climate Change & Water 13 15 55 [www.environment.nsw.gov.au](http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au)
- NSW Health [www.health.nsw.gov.au](http://www.health.nsw.gov.au)

### **Publications and Information**

- Fibro Asbestos – A Home owners and renovators guide [www.nsw.gov.au/fibro](http://www.nsw.gov.au/fibro)
- Working with Asbestos-Guide 2008 [www.workcover.nsw.gov.au](http://www.workcover.nsw.gov.au)

### **Legislation and Codes**

- Acts and Regulations [www.legislation.nsw.gov.au](http://www.legislation.nsw.gov.au)
- Health and Safety [www.workcover.nsw.gov.au](http://www.workcover.nsw.gov.au)

- Asbestos: Code of practice and guidance notes [www.nohsc.gov.au](http://www.nohsc.gov.au)
- Australian Standards [www.standards.com.au](http://www.standards.com.au)
- WorkCover Information Centre 13 10 55

### **Asbestos Removal**

- ARCA (Asbestos Removal Contractors Association) 8586 3521
- Refer to your Yellow Pages Directory (i.e. under Asbestos Removal &/or Treatment)

### **Asbestos Disposal**

- WSN Environmental Solutions (formerly Waste Service NSW)  
(02) 9934 7000 or 1300 651 116 [www.wasteservice.nsw.gov.au](http://www.wasteservice.nsw.gov.au) or  
[www.wsn.com.au](http://www.wsn.com.au)
- Department of Environment & Conservation (formerly EPA)  
13 15 55 [www.environment.nsw.gov.au](http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au)