

FACT SHEET

Property hazards following a flood/storm damage

Asbestos – cleaning and/or removing asbestos containing materials

This information is for home owners, businesses and volunteers who are involved with the clean up and recovery of buildings damaged by the recent floods.

Where are asbestos materials found?

Buildings built before 1987 may contain asbestos in the form of flat or corrugated sheets (fibro) used for walls, ceilings, asbestos backed vinyl floor coverings, roofing, or in products such as pipes, electrical conduit and eaves. For information on where asbestos can be found around the home, visit asbestosawareness.com.au/asbestos-in-the-home

A site assessment to identify asbestos can be undertaken by a licensed asbestos assessor or occupational hygienist. In some cases, emergency services may undertake this role in an emergency situation.

General household debris, such as kitchen bench tops, chests, wardrobes, shelves and cabinets are unlikely to contain asbestos and can be disposed of without any concern with general rubbish.

Planning to remove less than 10m² of asbestos materials

When planning to remove less than 10 square metres of asbestos materials visit asbestosawareness.com.au and download the guide *Asbestos: a guide for householders and the general public*.

This document provides clear information on the equipment you need, how to prepare your work area, removing the asbestos materials and cleaning up.

Planning to remove 10m² or more of asbestos materials

Removal of friable asbestos, or 10 square metres or more of non-friable asbestos materials, must be done by a licensed asbestos removalist. For licensed asbestos removalists visit workcover.nsw.gov.au/information-searches/asbestos-demolition-licence-holders

Action required

Do not enter your property until you are advised that it is safe to do so by emergency services, utilities companies or local council. Before returning to your property after a flood, consider the following hazards:

- Electrical hazards could exist, such as live power lines that may be down or active solar panels.
- Buildings and other structures may be unstable to enter or walk over.
- Sewerage services may be disrupted, causing health risks.
- Building rubble should not be buried, as it may contain hazardous materials.

Use appropriate personal protective equipment, including:

- sturdy footwear and heavy duty work gloves, to protect you from being cut by broken glass or standing on sharp objects
- protective overalls with long sleeves and trousers and, where possible, disposable coveralls (throw them out with the site waste after use)

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- P2 face masks, as a minimum, to filter out fine particles including asbestos fibres. P2 masks can be purchased from a hardware store. Do not use ordinary paper dust masks, handkerchiefs or bandannas.

Don't:

- remove asbestos materials altogether, unless absolutely necessary – only remove asbestos materials that are already broken and dislodged
- break asbestos materials
- walk on corrugated asbestos roofs, as they may collapse from the weight
- clean asbestos roofs and other asbestos materials using high pressure water cleaners or water blasters:
 - take care when cleaning the surface of asbestos materials to avoid damage and the release of asbestos fibres
 - clean walls and other surfaces containing asbestos materials using water hoses or by hand
 - regularly check the surface of the material you are cleaning to ensure it is not being damaged.
- use power tools or any abrasive materials such as sanders on asbestos materials
- dispose of asbestos waste into bins or with items for curbside collection.

In all situations:

- turn off all electricity before starting work where water may contact electrical installations
- make sure asbestos materials are kept damp at all times when working with them – use a garden hose, watering can, trigger-spray bottle or similar; don't use high pressure cleaners.

When cleaning asbestos materials:

- use soapy water with a cloth, sponge, light scrubbing device such as a soft brush or broom, or a garden hose
- regularly check the surface of the material you are cleaning to make sure it is not being damaged. If damage is occurring, clean more gently.

When picking up pieces of asbestos material:

- wet the pieces with water if they're not already wet
- pick up the pieces and double wrap them with heavy duty (0.2mm) thick plastic and seal the bag opening with tape or a knot. You can purchase 0.2mm plastic in bags or rolls of sheeting at a local hardware store
- label the outer bag 'Caution – Asbestos Waste'
- contact your local council to find out where to dispose of asbestos waste in your area or go to epa.nsw.gov.au/managewaste/house-asbestos-land.htm to find a landfill that accepts asbestos waste.

Further Information

For information about the safe handling and removal of asbestos, visit workcover.nsw.gov.au

For information about transport and disposal of hazardous materials, visit epa.nsw.gov.au or your local council website.

For information about the health risks associated with asbestos, visit health.nsw.gov.au

For information about common areas where asbestos can be found in the home, visit asbestosawareness.com.au

Disclaimer

This publication may contain work health and safety and workers compensation information. It may include some of your obligations under the various legislations that WorkCover NSW administers. To ensure you comply with your legal obligations you must refer to the appropriate legislation.

Information on the latest laws can be checked by visiting the NSW legislation website www.legislation.nsw.gov.au

This publication does not represent a comprehensive statement of the law as it applies to particular problems or to individuals or as a substitute for legal advice. You should seek independent legal advice if you need assistance on the application of the law to your situation.

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