

Information Sheet: Asbestos Management

Purpose

The purpose of this information sheet is to provide general information for staff concerned about potential or actual exposure to asbestos/asbestos containing material. The information should be read in conjunction with the [Asbestos Management](#) chapter of the HSW Handbook.

Q1 What is asbestos? (in accordance with the definition provided by SafeWork Australia)
 Asbestos is a naturally-occurring mineral and can typically be found in rock, sediment or soil. It has strong fibres that are heat resistant and have good insulating properties. You can't see asbestos fibres with the naked eye and because they are very light, they can be blown long distances by the wind. Because of its properties, which are described as being either 'non-friable or 'friable', asbestos was seen as being very useful for building products.

- **Friable asbestos** is a material containing asbestos that when dry, is in powder form or may be crushed or pulverised into powder form using your hand. This material poses a higher risk of exposing people to airborne asbestos fibres. Friable asbestos was commonly used in industrial applications rather than the home, although loose-fill asbestos has been found in homes, where it was sold as ceiling and wall insulation.
- **Non-friable or bonded asbestos** products are solid and you can't crumble them in your hand—the asbestos has been mixed with a bonding compound such as cement. If non-friable asbestos is damaged or degraded it may become friable and will then pose a higher risk of fibre release.

Q2 How do I know if a material contains asbestos/asbestos containing material?
 Generally, it is not possible to determine whether a material contains asbestos simply by looking at it. The only way to be sure it contains asbestos is to get a sample analysed by a laboratory. Please contact [Service Delivery](#) who will be able to provide you with advice.

Q3 What if you think there may be some asbestos/asbestos containing material in an area that is inaccessible?
 Building owners are not required to dismantle parts of the building or plant to locate asbestos. If there are plans to demolish or alter these areas, an assessment would be undertaken by Infrastructure Service Delivery/Projects to check for asbestos before starting work. Please contact [Service Delivery](#) if you have a concern.

Q4 Why are we cautious around asbestos and asbestos containing material (ACM)?
 Asbestos has been linked to certain health problems amongst those exposed to high levels of air borne fibres. Breathing in asbestos fibres could cause asbestosis, lung cancer and mesothelioma.

We know that in Australia, due to the known risks, a total ban on asbestos came into effect on 31 December 2003. It is therefore illegal to make it, use it or import it from another country.

Q5 What asbestos related activities are seen as increasing the risk of exposure and what is in place to manage the risk?

The activities which may be seen as increasing the risk of exposure to asbestos often relate to construction/capital works activities. (e.g. construction, alteration, fitting-out, demolition or dismantling of a structure which has been identified as containing asbestos or asbestos containing material [ACM]) or suspected of containing asbestos/ACM.

To manage the risk, the University has in place specific requirements for:

- any construction project where asbestos has been identified to ensure the elimination of risk to contractors and any other person in the vicinity;
- all work involving the potential disturbance or removal of asbestos to be conducted under the overall management of Service Delivery Branch;
- the labelling/signage of all identified asbestos; and
- ensuring that only licensed contractors are engaged to remove asbestos in accordance with the Legislative requirements.

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- Q6 What do I do if I have been exposed to confirmed asbestos fibres? (e.g. the presence of asbestos/asbestos containing material is known and identified on the asbestos register)**
 Notify your supervisor as soon as possible and report the incident in the University's [incident reporting system](#). This will ensure that you are immediately provided with information, support and guidance. It will also ensure that appropriate action is taken to prevent the exposure of any other workers (or people in the vicinity) and the incident is promptly investigated.
 (Note: This is a notifiable incident under the [Work Health and Safety legislation](#) and will be managed in accordance with the [Report a safety issue or incident HSW Handbook chapter](#). A permanent record will be created in the University's Records Management Office so that should any asbestos related health issues occur they can be dealt with under Workers Compensation or other appropriate processes/Insurance.)
- Q7 What is the process if you think you have possibly disturbed asbestos/asbestos containing material?**
 Cease work immediately and ensure that other people working in the area are notified of a possible risk (or notify the Supervisor to pass this information on to others). Contact Service Delivery (831 34008) as a priority. The University's licensed asbestos service provider will be contacted to undertake an analysis and/or air monitoring as applicable. If confirmed, then corrective action will be taken to eliminate the risk of exposure. You will also be provided with support and guidance by your local and central [HSW Team](#).
- Q8 Where do I obtain more information on asbestos/asbestos containing material?**
 If you require further information, please contact a member of the local [HSW Team](#).

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