

# Asbestos Answers

Asbestos is a dangerous material that could be found in your home. It is important that you understand what it is, and where it might be so that you can protect the health of your family and the community.

This information is especially important if you are thinking about renovating your home.

## 1 What is asbestos?

Asbestos is a mineral that occurs naturally in the environment. It appears as tiny fibres that, on their own, are not visible to the naked eye. It is these fibres that can make you sick if they are inhaled.

Asbestos fibres were added to many building materials because they helped to strengthen them, as well as provide other benefits including improved insulation and heat-resistant properties.

Sometimes the fibres were bonded with cement, vinyl and other materials which encase the fibres – these are known as non-friable, and are by far the most common asbestos products that you will encounter in home maintenance and renovation projects. Common names in the community for these products include: fibro, super six and bonded asbestos.

The trick when it comes to remaining safe and healthy in the presence of asbestos is knowing which building materials these fibres were added to, and taking the appropriate care when coming into contact with them.

## 2 When should I worry about asbestos?

If your home, and in particular the asbestos-containing products within it, are well maintained, then you are OK.

You need to be concerned about the asbestos in your home when it becomes damaged (to the extent that the asbestos fibres can be released) or when you are thinking about embarking on a home renovation project.

## 3 How can asbestos fibres make me sick?

Asbestos fibres can make you sick if you inhale them. That's the only way! If the fibres are safely encased in well-maintained building products then you are safe.

Once inhaled they can enter the smallest air passages in the lungs where they embed in lung tissue and can eventually (even decades later) result in the development of an asbestos related disease. Many of these diseases are incurable.

## 4 Could my house have asbestos?

If your home was built before 1990 it is very likely that it contains some building products that have asbestos fibres in them (after 1990 it is less likely but still possible!). The use of asbestos was banned from use in building materials in 1989 and since 31 December 2003, the manufacture, reuse, sale or import of any form of asbestos has been prohibited.

The most common asbestos-containing materials that you will find in your homes are of the non-friable variety – that is, those that are bonded into solid panels. These products are likely to be used for: roofing, exterior and interior wall cladding, eaves, fences, shingles & siding, thermal board around fireplaces, water and flue pipes, and backing of electrical boards.

Visit [www.asbestosawareness.com.au](http://www.asbestosawareness.com.au) for some images of common asbestos containing building materials.

## 5 How do I know for sure if my home has asbestos?

The only way to know for sure whether a building product contains asbestos fibres is to get it tested by an accredited testing facility. If you are unsure whether a building material contains asbestos treat it as though it does...better to be safe than sorry!

## 6 Am I allowed to remove bonded asbestos from my house?

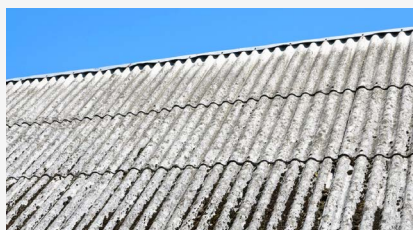
We always recommend that you use a licensed contractor to remove any amount of asbestos; however, the true answer is – it depends on the quantity!

If the area of asbestos sheeting is less than 10 square metres, then you are allowed to remove it yourself.

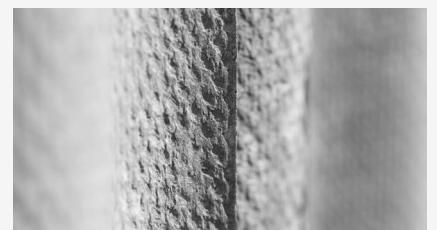
If the area of asbestos that you need to remove is greater than 10 square metres, then the answer is no – you are not allowed to remove it yourself! For such quantities you must get a licensed contractor to do the work. That's the rules!



Classic fibro home with asbestos cladding/eaves



Common asbestos roofing



Dimple pattern can indicate presence of asbestos

## 7 What is the safest way to remove asbestos?

The safest way to remove any quantity of asbestos is to get an appropriately licensed professional to come and do the work for you. To find a list of licensed contractors near you, visit [www.workcover.nsw.gov.au](http://www.workcover.nsw.gov.au)

However, if you have less than 10 square metres of asbestos sheeting and you make the decision to do the removal work yourself, then you must wear the right protective gear and then get familiar with a long list of DON'Ts! Don't drill it, don't cut it, don't drop it, don't sand it, don't saw it, don't break it up, don't scrape it, don't scrub it, don't dismantle it or waterblast it.

Before you get started visit [www.asbestosawareness.com.au](http://www.asbestosawareness.com.au) for more information.

## 8 Can I put asbestos in my garbage bin or out with Council clean up?

Definitely not! You can never place asbestos in your council garbage bins or out with your council clean up.

## 9 How can I dispose of asbestos?

The only way to lawfully dispose of asbestos is to:

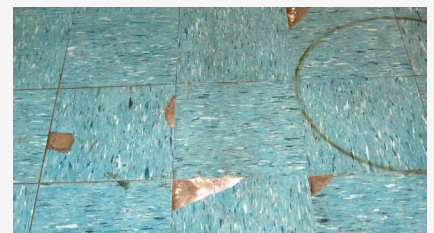
- transport it to a waste management facility that is licensed to accept it (visit [www.epa.nsw.gov.au](http://www.epa.nsw.gov.au) for a list of local disposal sites)
- contact a licensed demolition company/ asbestos removalist to collect it
- call your local council to see if they have any programs to assist you.



Safe asbestos removal in progress\*



Asbestos fencing in need of repair\*



Damaged vinyl floor tiles containing asbestos\*

\*Photos are courtesy of the Asbestos Education Committee.

## 10 I live in a Housing NSW property. What can I do about some damaged asbestos?

If you are concerned about the state of some asbestos in your Housing NSW property, you should report your concerns to the Housing NSW Contact Centre on 1300 468 7464. The matter will be investigated and any necessary action taken.

## 11 I am concerned about the state of some asbestos in a property I privately lease. Do I have any rights to have it repaired?

As a private tenant, you do have rights under the **Residential Tenancies Act 2010** and the **Residential Tenancies Regulation 2010** in relation to asbestos. Have a look at this website for more information at [www.tenants.org.au](http://www.tenants.org.au)

## 12 When should I call my local council?

Call your local council straight away if you:

- find some dumped asbestos
- want to remove asbestos from your home but don't know if you need approval first
- are concerned about how someone is removing asbestos in the community
- need basic removal and disposal advice
- need to know how to find a professional that can help you
- need more general information about asbestos.

We will always do our best to help, so don't hesitate to call.

Contact your local council for more information or to make sure you don't need approval before commencing any projects involving asbestos removal. Interpreter services are usually available.

Cumberland Council distributes the information on this fact sheet as a general reference source. It has been developed in good faith exercising due care and attention. Users should satisfy themselves of the applicability of the information provided to their unique situation and seek expert advice where necessary.

For more information visit [www.asbestosanswers.com.au](http://www.asbestosanswers.com.au)

### Other important contacts

NSW Environment Protection Authority – 131 555  
Workcover NSW – 13 10 50  
Cumberland Council – 02 8757 9000