

Asbestos

Your organisation has a legal obligation to provide and maintain a safe environment for your volunteers, customers, and visitors – you can read more on this in the previous [Sector Brief – Safety Responsibility and Accountability](#).

Under the Duty of Care requirements, you should have in place processes to identify, control, and monitor risk. See [Sector Brief – Managing Safety Risk](#). A specific risk for workers and visitors to your site is asbestos. This sector briefing covers identifying and controlling the risks associated with asbestos.



Asbestos is a naturally occurring fibrous silicate mineral. It was considered a revolutionary product because it can withstand heat, erosion and decay and has fire and water-resistant properties. These properties mean it was used extensively across construction and industry until its ban in Australia 2003.



IMPORTANT

Many heritage items and buildings will have asbestos within them. Thus, it's essential that your organisation understands the risks associated with asbestos, where it may be, and manages the risk.

1) Risks associated with asbestos

Embedded asbestos fibres irritate the lung tissue, causing many diseases, including Mesothelioma (cancer), Pleural Disease, Asbestosis, and lung cancer. Asbestos-related diseases can take many years to develop. Most conditions will not become apparent for at least ten years.

2) Where asbestos may be found?

Many items may contain asbestos. These include: [adhesives and dry powder mixes](#), [asbestos cement conduits](#), [asbestos cement sheet](#), [asbestos covered cables](#), [asbestos rope](#), [caulking & putty](#), [circuit breaker arc chutes](#), [engine packing and rope](#), [fuse holders](#), [gaskets](#), [moulded cement electrical sheet](#), [thermal acoustic spray insulation](#) and [yarn, cloth or webbing](#). There are other items which can be found on the [Asbestos Database](#).

3) Controlling the hazards

You must implement appropriate safe systems in accordance with the hierarchy of controls to eliminate or minimise the risks to health and safety from asbestos.

4) Controlling the hazards - Identify

To meet your Duty of Care responsibilities you need to identify where asbestos is present (including in heritage items and buildings). If there is uncertainty as to whether asbestos is present it can either be assumed asbestos is present and treat it with appropriate caution based on the level of risk or have a sample analysed.

Asbestos

If it is assumed to be asbestos, there is no need to take a sample for analysis. This means the suspect material can remain undisturbed and the time and cost of sampling and analysis is avoided.



TIP

Allocating one person within your organisation to being responsible for the management of asbestos will likely have a better outcome than if it is a shared responsibility. The allocated person should walk to site identifying locations where asbestos or Asbestos Containing Material (ACM) is or suspected to be.



IMPORTANT

You must assume material is asbestos or ACM if it cannot be identified, but it is reasonably believed to be asbestos or ACM, and you must assume asbestos is present if part of the site is inaccessible (that is, cannot be accessed during normal daily activities or routine maintenance) and it is likely to contain asbestos or ACM.

When asbestos or ACM is suspected it can be verified by testing using a licenced contractor.

The person responsible for the identification and management of asbestos:

- Have the knowledge and experience to identify suspected asbestos and be able to determine risk and control measures,
- Be familiar with building and construction practices to determine where asbestos is likely to be present, and/or
- Be able to determine that material may be friable or non-friable asbestos and evaluate its condition.

5) Controlling the hazards – Manage

If you suspect that you may have found asbestos do not disturb it. Specifically, do not cut, sand, drill, scrape or scrub it. There is no requirement to remove asbestos, but it must be managed So Far as is Reasonably Practical (SFAIRP). Two approaches to the management of asbestos are:

- 1) Removal – This effectively eliminates the on-going risk but does come with risks and cost during its removal.
- 2) Manage in-situ - This control is not as effective as removal but can still be justifiably safe SFAIRP.

6) Controlling the hazards – Removal

If the area is greater than 10m² a licenced contractor must be used. Areas less the 10m², maybe removed by a non-licence person, but the risks should be managed in accordance with the [Code of Practice – How to Safely Remove Asbestos](#), including wet spraying, use of correct tools and equipment and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).

Asbestos waste is classified as hazardous and can legally only be disposed of at a landfill that's licensed to accept it. THNSW strongly recommend using a [licensed asbestos removalist](#) to remove and dispose of asbestos waste.

Asbestos

7) Controlling the hazards – In-situ

To manage the risks of asbestos in-situ you must:

- 1) Have a register of where asbestos is known or suspected to be present. This register should contain:
 - a. Site.
 - b. Specific Location.
 - c. Date asbestos was identified or assumed to be present.
 - d. Type of material.
 - e. Whether is it friable or non-friable.
 - f. Condition.
 - g. Is the area accessible?

This register should be updated as new information becomes available and reviewed at a minimum of every 5 years. The register should be made available to all who may disturb asbestos or ACM.

- 2) Where practical, indicate the presence of asbestos using labels or warning signs. These signs are available from many suppliers, including [Seton](#).
- 3) Assess the risk of exposure. If asbestos or ACM is in good condition and left undisturbed, it is unlikely that airborne asbestos will be released into the air and the risk to health is extremely low. It is often safer to leave it and review its condition over time. However, if the asbestos or ACM has deteriorated, needs to be or has been disturbed, or if asbestos-contaminated dust is present, the likelihood that airborne asbestos will be released into the air is increased.
- 4) Inform those that might be impacted by asbestos or ACM of the correct protocols to be applied, including who to notify if new asbestos or ACM is suspected.

Asbestos is, and will continue to be, a risk for all heritage groups. By applying the risk mitigation strategies detailed above, you can demonstratively show you have managed the risk and prevent harm to volunteers, customers, and visitors.

If you have more questions or queries, contact:

John Thorogood
Safety, Environment & Quality Manager
Transport Heritage NSW
john.thorogood@thnsw.com.au
0418 615 555

This advice and information is general in nature, does not take into account the specific circumstances of any particular Sector Group, entity or person and is intended as a guide only. THNSW recommends reviewing your particular circumstances before applying any of the advice or information. While every reasonable care has been taken in the preparation of this advice and information, THNSW does not guarantee the accuracy, correctness, usefulness or completeness of any facts or opinions contained within it. THNSW accepts no responsibility or liability for any claims, losses, damage, incidents, issues, or other consequences alleged to arise or arising from acting on this advice or information.