LUNG FOUNDATION AUSTRALIA
"When you can't breathe... nothing else matters"®

Asbestos in the Home

What is asbestos?

Asbestos refers to a group of naturally forming minerals that are widely distributed in nature and have been used since ancient times. Asbestos was widely used due to its strength, flexibility, resistance to fire and chemicals, insulating qualities, and the relatively cheap cost for mining and processing it.

Australia was one of the largest consumers of asbestos worldwide. Australia only began regulating the use of asbestos products in the late 1970s and a ban on asbestos was introduced in 2003.

The regulation and subsequent banning of asbestos in Australia were a result of evidence proving asbestos to be a highly toxic, insidious, and environmentally persistent material that is responsible for a number of debilitating and deadly diseases.

The three most widely used types of asbestos are: ***Crocidolite*** (blue asbestos), ***Amosite*** (brown or grey asbestos), and ***Chrysotile*** (white asbestos). Asbestos-containing building products are classified as either **friable** (soft, crumbly) or **bonded** (solid, rigid, non-friable).

- Friable asbestos products are generally quite soft and loose and can be crumbled into fine dust with very light pressure, such as crushing in your hand. Friable asbestos products contain high levels of asbestos (up to 100%) loosely held in the product so that the asbestos fibres are easily released into the air. Thermal insulation around pipes is an example of a friable asbestos product.

- Bonded asbestos products are made from a bonding compound (such as cement) mixed with a small proportion of asbestos (usually less than 15%). Fibro Sheeting is an example of a bonded asbestos product.

Why is asbestos dangerous?

Friable asbestos products are dangerous because the asbestos fibres can get into the air very easily, and may be inhaled by people living or working in the vicinity.

Although bonded asbestos products do not normally release any asbestos fibres into the air and are considered a very low risk, there is potential for damaged or weathered (including hail damage) products to become friable thereby creating the risk of releasing asbestos fibres into the air.

Small airborne asbestos fibres carry the greatest risk as they can be inhaled into the respiratory system via the nose and mouth. Asbestos fibres can also be swallowed and then enter the digestive system.

Asbestos fibres that are inhaled into the lungs can become lodged or embedded into the lung tissue. These fibres can irritate lung tissue surrounding them and may cause a number of health concerns including a number of asbestos related lung diseases. For more information on these diseases please visit the Lung Foundation Australia website: www.lungfoundation.com.au.

Asbestos related diseases can take many years to develop in some cases up to 20 – 40 years after exposure. However it is important to note that exposure to asbestos fibres does not always result in an asbestos related disease.

The Government has created a National Asbestos Exposure Register to record the details of members of the Australian community who think they may have been exposed to asbestos containing materials. If you think you may have been exposed to asbestos containing materials you can register your details via the website: http://asbestossafety.gov.au/national-asbestos-exposure-register

Where you might find asbestos

The versatility of asbestos made it attractive to many industries and is thought to have more than 3000 applications worldwide, with Australia being one of the highest users of asbestos. This same versatility now poses a problem for identifying areas that still contain asbestos products and the potential for people to be exposed to asbestos and its associated health risks.

Approximately one third of all homes built in Australia contain asbestos products and any home built prior to 1991 could possibly contain asbestos products.
As a general rule if your house was built:

- Before the mid-1980s – It is **highly likely** that it has asbestos-containing products.
- Between the mid-1980s and 1990 – It is **likely** that it has asbestos-containing products.
- After 1990 – It is **unlikely** that it has asbestos-containing products*

* Some houses built in the 1990s and early 2000s may have still used asbestos cement materials until the total ban on any activities involving asbestos products became effective from December 2003.

Steps for reducing your risk

1) Know where asbestos-containing products could be in your home. If in doubt, get the product tested, or assume it is asbestos.
2) Maintain asbestos-containing products in good condition (e.g. use paint, surface finishes, enclosures, or capping).
3) Replace asbestos cement materials if they are damaged. Ensure all friable asbestos is removed by a licensed asbestos removalist.
4) Plan ahead to prevent disturbing and releasing asbestos fibres, especially when renovating.
5) Get advice from your local or State/Territory government on safe handling and disposal of asbestos-containing products. See list below.
6) Engage a licensed asbestos removalist when undertaking major home renovations or demolitions where asbestos might be present.

If you are thinking about renovating, you must be aware of asbestos. It is important for home owners and renovators to be aware of how to safely manage asbestos in and around the home.

If you suspect you have an asbestos containing material in your home:

Do not cut it
Do not scrub it
Do not saw it
Do not scrape it
Do not water blast it
Do not tip it
Do not drill it
Do not sand it
Do not dismantle it
Do not demolish it

Do not dump it!

Source: asbestosawareness.com.au

For more detailed information about Asbestos please visit the Asbestos Awareness website at asbestosawareness.com.au

State contacts for more information about asbestos in your home and safe asbestos removal:

ACT:

General Information - Asbestos Awareness:
www.asbestos.act.gov.au/about_asbestos/removing_asbestos
Removal, transport and disposal - ACT NOWaste: www.tams.act.gov.au/recycling-waste

NSW:

General Information - Workcover NSW: www.workcover.nsw.gov.au/newlegislation2012/health-and-safety-topics/asbestos/Pages/default.aspx
Removal, transport and disposal - Workers Health Centre: www.workershealth.com.au/Workers-Health/fact-sheets.html

QLD:

General Information - Queensland Health: www.health.qld.gov.au/asbestos/
Removal, transport and disposal – 13QGOV (13 7468): www.qld.gov.au/asbestos

SA:

General Information - SafeWork SA:
https://www.safework.sa.gov.au/show_page.jsp?id=2974#.U170QfmSxzZ
Removal, transport and disposal - Environment Protection Authority: www.epa.sa.gov.au

TAS:

General Information and Removal, transport and disposal - WorkSafe Tasmania:
www.worksafe.tas.gov.au/health_and_safety/topics/subject/asbestos

VIC:

General Information - Asbestos.vic.gov: www.asbestos.vic.gov.au/in-the-home
Removal, transport and disposal – Worksafe Victoria: http://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/safety-and-prevention/health-and-safety-topics/asbestos

WA:

General Information - WA Department of Health – Public Health:
http://www.public.health.wa.gov.au/3/1143/2/asbestos_in_the_home.pm
Removal, transport and disposal – Department of Environment and Conservation:
http://der.wa.gov.au/your-environment/contaminated-sites/59-asbestos

NT:

General Information - Northern Territory Department of Health:
http://health.nt.gov.au/Environmental_Health/Asbestos_Management/index.aspx
Removal, transport and disposal – Environment Protection Authority: www.ntepa.nt.gov.au

National Information:

Lung Foundation Australia: www.lungfoundation.com.au
Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency: www.asbestossafety.gov.au
Asbestos Awareness: http://www.asbestosawareness.com.au/

Common locations of materials containing asbestos in a house

Example of a house with a concrete or clay (terracotta) tiled roof