



High pressure water cleaning of asbestos cement prohibited

Background

WorkSafe reminds painting professionals and other contractors that high pressure water cleaning of asbestos cement material is prohibited.

WorkSafe is investigating an incident where a registered painter used a high pressure water cleaner on an asbestos cement roof to prepare it for painting. This resulted in the property and neighbouring properties being contaminated by asbestos.

Cleaning up properties contaminated by asbestos residue from high pressure water cleaning of asbestos cement material is a very expensive process. Clean-up costs of between \$7,000 and \$50,000 have been reported.

The use of high pressure water on asbestos cement material is prohibited under Regulation 5.14 and Schedule 5.2 of the *Occupational Safety and Health Regulations 1996*. It is also prohibited under the *Health (Asbestos) Regulations 1992* administered by local government authorities.

Contributing factors

- Using high pressure water cleaners on asbestos cement breaks down the surface of the material, and spreads asbestos-containing residue over a wide area, including neighbouring properties.
- The asbestos residue that is dispersed as a result of the cleaning is considered friable and easily releases respirable asbestos fibres which pose a significant risk to health.
- Local Government Authorities can declare affected properties to be contaminated under the Contaminated Sites Act 2003. This Act imposes additional requirements for cleaning up asbestos-contaminated soil.
- Asbestos-containing residue from high pressure cleaning of asbestos cement must be cleaned up by an asbestos removalist holding an unrestricted licence. There are also requirements for collection and testing of samples from affected areas to ensure affected properties have been adequately cleaned up.
- Workers engaged to paint asbestos cement surfaces may have been inadequately trained in identification of asbestos containing materials and appropriate safe work methods for cleaning and painting such materials.

Regional Offices

Action required

1. Do not use high pressure water blasters on asbestos cement material.
2. People seeking to paint asbestos cement material such as roof sheeting that needs to be cleaned prior to painting can only use non-abrasive preparation techniques such as the use of cleaning solutions that can be applied and washed off with low pressure water.
3. Painters intending to paint asbestos cement material should consult paint manufacturers to obtain further information on suitable alternative preparation techniques.
4. If the asbestos cement material is in poor condition, replacement is recommended instead of painting.
5. Ensure workers engaged to clean or paint asbestos containing materials have been informed about the hazards and safe work method for the task.
6. Where asbestos containing material is present at a workplace, an asbestos register must be available and used in planning work that may disturb the material.

Further information

- [Occupational Safety and Health Regulations 1996](#) – Regulation 5.14 and Schedule 5.2
- [Health \(Asbestos\) Regulations 1992](#)
- [National Code of Practice for the Management and control of asbestos in workplaces \[NOHSC: 2018\(2005\)\]](#) – See Appendix E: Sealing, Painting, Coating and Cleaning of Asbestos Cement Products
- Workplace Health and Safety Queensland – [High pressure water spray on asbestos roof](#)

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