



Asbestos found in imported friction wear plates in rail carriages

Background

Asbestos has recently been found in friction wear plates in the suspension systems of rail carriages. The new rail carriages were purchased between 2007 and 2014 and were imported from China. They were thought to be asbestos-free and the wear plates have not needed replacing since the carriages were acquired. Testing by a National Association of Testing Authorities (NATA) accredited laboratory in Australia has found that the wear plates contain chrysotile (white) asbestos.



Wagon suspension system

← Asbestos containing wedge wear plate



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Asbestos has also recently been found in a range of imported building products across Australia, including fibre cement boards, expanded polystyrene panels and gaskets in various forms of plant.

All forms of asbestos containing materials have been prohibited imports in Australia since 31 December 2003.

Contributing factors

- Some countries still manufacture products that contain asbestos, and may classify goods as “asbestos free” even when they contain a proportion of asbestos.
- Certification provided to importers from overseas manufacturers that goods are asbestos free has sometimes been proven incorrect or unreliable.

Action required

- Businesses that own or operate rail carriages should ensure that wear plates have been tested for the presence of asbestos and the test results recorded.
- If asbestos is identified in materials at workplaces and these were not in situ prior to 31 December 2003, WorkSafe should be informed and a plan made to remove the asbestos containing materials.
- Importers from countries that still manufacture asbestos-containing goods should be aware of the different definitions and standards applied to asbestos in the country of origin.
- Obtain product testing results from the overseas supplier or manufacturer to check that the plant/goods do not contain any asbestos (testing should be carried out at an accredited laboratory equivalent to NATA).
- Arrange for an independent test of plant components or building products before they are initially shipped to Australia. NATA accredited laboratories in Australia and international equivalent laboratories are listed on the NATA website (see below).
- Multiple shipments of the same product will require additional random testing (NATA accredited or equivalent laboratory) to check that subsequent batches of the goods are asbestos free.

Further information

- [Western Australian safety and health laws that apply to asbestos](#);
- The Asbestos and Eradication Agency has information for [Guidance for importers and exporters](#);
- The Department of Immigration and Border Protection has [information about prohibited asbestos imports](#);
- The National Association of Testing Authorities provides [information on working with accredited asbestos facilities for import/export](#).

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