



## Raw asbestos found in empty sea containers

Recently WorkSafe became aware that a number of empty sea containers had come into Fremantle port contaminated with raw chrysotile (white asbestos). The friable asbestos was present within the sea containers and also in and around the vents (Figure 1).

The sea containers had previously been used to transport raw mined asbestos internationally.

The sea containers were inspected and maintained as per normal practice, however, identification of the asbestos contamination was delayed as systems were not in place. As a result two of the sea containers were processed and packed with goods. One of these was recalled unopened, however the other had already been shipped.

All forms of asbestos have been prohibited imports in Australia since 31 December 2003, whether in raw form or within products.



Raw chrysotile (white asbestos) contamination found in a sea container.

Figure 1: Contaminated sea container

### Contributing factors

- Some countries still mine asbestos and manufacture products that contain asbestos.
- Sea containers are used to transport raw mined asbestos to countries that continue to use asbestos in manufacturing processes.
- Empty sea containers are regularly transported to Australia for further use.
- Many countries do not have strict quarantine laws. As a result sea containers may not be cleaned prior to arrival into Australia and may be contaminated.
- Workers may have difficulty visually identifying the hazard.

### Action required

1. If involved in international shipping, ensure that your company has systems in place to identify possible asbestos contamination of sea containers.
2. Ensure that your workers are informed and trained on this system so that early detection is possible.
3. Have suspect material tested by a NATA accredited laboratory.
4. Once positive identification has occurred we recommend WorkSafe WA is notified.
5. Ensure any asbestos remediation is conducted in accordance with legislative requirements, including using an asbestos removalist with the appropriate licence.

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## Further Information

- Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency – [Illegal asbestos imports – safety alerts and recalls](#)
- Department of Immigration & Border Protection website - [Prohibited asbestos imports](#)
- Safe Work Australia - [Information Sheet – Managing risks when unpacking shipping containers](#)
- Wikimedia Commons – [Chrysotile ore image](#)
- WorkSafe - Safety and Health Topic - [Asbestos](#)

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