



Asbestos safety for trades and construction workers



What are the do's and don'ts when working with asbestos?

Do's

- ✓ Ensure you have sufficient knowledge to be able to identify asbestos containing materials or consult someone who does
- ✓ Always check if asbestos is present before you begin work
- ✓ Ask to see the asbestos register at the workplace, or ask the property owner if they know of any asbestos in the property
- ✓ Always wear appropriate PPE
- ✓ Ask an asbestos professional for advice and have a sample tested,
or
- ✓ Assume the material contains asbestos and take the necessary precautions.

Don'ts

- Do not use brooms or brushes to dry-sweep asbestos containing dust
- Do not use high-speed power tools to cut, grind, sand or drill asbestos materials
- Do not use high pressure water or compressed air to clean asbestos materials
- Do not use industrial drying fans in areas where damaged or friable asbestos might be present, until the area has been certified as clear of remaining asbestos.

When are licences required for asbestos removal?

Western Australian work health and safety laws require asbestos to be removed from workplaces by a licensed asbestos removalist.

There are two classes of licensed asbestos removalists:

- **Class A:** authorised to remove all types of asbestos (friable and non-friable)
- **Class B:** authorised to remove only non-friable asbestos materials under WHS laws, no more than 10m² of non-friable asbestos can be removed without a license. *Note: 10m² is equivalent to about four sheets of asbestos cement wall sheeting or one wall of an average size bathroom.*

Licensed asbestos removalists are listed on WorkSafe's website:

www.worksafe.wa.gov.au/worksafe-licence-and-registration-search

Disposal

All asbestos waste must be double wrapped and secured for transport to a landfill authorised to accept asbestos waste. A licensed professional should include the cost of disposing of the asbestos waste legally within the costs of removal.



Don't risk your health

Anyone working in the building and construction industry is likely to come into contact with asbestos at some stage.

Asbestos was used in over 3,000 common products prior to being phased out in some uses by 1990 and banned in 2003. It is still present in millions of Australian homes and public and commercial buildings.

Common areas where asbestos can be found include:

- fire door cores
- water and sewer pipes
- roofing, gutters, downpipes
- eaves
- fencing
- cladding
- wet areas in kitchens and laundries
- bathrooms
- underneath carpet
- vinyl flooring
- insulation in roofs
- conduits.

Products containing asbestos are still produced overseas, and despite bans and border controls, these products sometimes enter Australia illegally.



Asbestos is known to cause cancer

Inhaling asbestos fibres is associated with fatal diseases including asbestosis, lung cancer and mesothelioma. All of these asbestos-related diseases contribute to approximately 4,000 deaths in Australia each year.



The people at greatest risk of exposure are those who disturb asbestos-containing materials during repairs, maintenance, renovations and other work on older buildings and infrastructure.

Asbestos-containing materials that are sealed, undamaged and left undisturbed are unlikely to release asbestos fibres. Their condition should be monitored to check for deterioration with a view to removing them when possible.

Repair and maintenance tasks

If you do not remove asbestos but come into contact with it as part of repair or maintenance work, you must take precautions to avoid disturbing or damaging the asbestos material. If you need to cut a hole into asbestos-containing materials, for example to install a cable or if you need to remove asbestos-containing flooring as part of your work, you must contain or capture any asbestos dust, such as using on-tool dust extraction. You must also wear appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE), and safely clean up and dispose of any waste containing asbestos.

The following are codes of practice to help you comply with your duties under the WHS law and include safe systems of work in the appendices:



How to manage and control asbestos in the workplace

How to safely remove asbestos





Asbestos registers

An asbestos register is a document that lists all identified or assumed asbestos in a workplace. An asbestos register is required for workplaces where the building was constructed prior to 31 December 2003 (unless no asbestos has been identified at the workplace). Always ask to see an asbestos register before you begin work at a building that was constructed prior to 31 December 2003.

What are my training requirements?

Workers carrying out work involving asbestos materials must:

- be trained in asbestos identification, safe handling and control measures
- use equipment designed to capture or suppress airborne asbestos, and
- follow safe removal, decontamination and disposal methods.

WHS laws also require a safe work method statement (SWMS) to be completed for construction work that disturbs or is likely to disturb asbestos, because this is considered high-risk construction work.



Myth

All I need to remove small amounts of asbestos is a P2 respirator and coveralls.



Fact

While wearing the right protective gear is important, it is not enough to fully protect you and others from asbestos.

There is a lot of other equipment and specific work practices that you must use to prevent asbestos contaminating everything around you. It is easier and safer to engage a licensed asbestos professional to remove the asbestos for you.



Did you know?

When wearing a fitted mask, you need to be clean shaven to ensure a proper seal between your face and mask to protect you from breathing in asbestos fibres. Otherwise, workers with beards, stubble or facial hair should use a powered air-purifying respirator (PAPR).



So who do you call?

Please refer to the table below for regulatory or other points of contact relating to specific asbestos issues.

Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety (WorkSafe)	
Asbestos in the workplace, licensing and asbestos removalists	Phone: 1300 307 877 www.commerce.wa.gov.au/worksafe/asbestos
Department of Health	
Soil contamination, home and public safety, identification	Phone: (08) 9222 4222 www.healthywa.wa.gov.au/asbestos
Department of Water and Environment Regulation	
Disposal, transportation, contaminated sites	Phone: 1300 762 982 www.der.wa.gov.au/your-environment/contaminated-sites/59-asbestos
Local Government	
Soil contamination, home and public safety, identification	Find your Local Council using the local government directory
National Association of Testing Laboratories (NATA)	
Testing of asbestos	nata.com.au/find-organisation/

Asbestos assistance

The Asbestos Safety and Eradication Authority (ASEA) provides a national focus on asbestos issues, including brochures for electricians, plumbers and other trades, and has a register for personal asbestos exposures.

www.asbestossafety.gov.au

The Australian Asbestos Network provides a wide range of information on asbestos issues.

www.australianasbestosnetwork.org.au

Reflections is a charitable organisation based in WA reducing the impact of asbestos on the community.

www.reflections.org.au

The Asbestos Diseases Society of Australia (ADSA) is a charitable organisation providing support to people with asbestos-related diseases.

www.asbestosdiseases.org.au