



Exposure to asbestos during demolition works

Background

WorkSafe has identified instances where demolition work was conducted without first removing asbestos-containing materials.

Recently, workers may have been exposed to asbestos while carrying out demolition work on a residential building. The workers examined the building prior to commencing the demolition and noted the presence of fibre cement sheeting on the dwelling and an attached garage. This material was not deemed to be asbestos cement and the workers proceeded to demolish the building using an excavator.

While demolishing the bathroom, asbestos cement material that had been concealed by tiles and the bath was uncovered. At this time, the material was not identified as containing asbestos and it was then broken up by the excavator and distributed through the rubble in that area of the property. Safe work procedures for the removal of asbestos were not in place.

Asbestos was subsequently identified in the rubble and the demolition was stopped. The workers manually removed the asbestos cement fragments using procedures for handling asbestos-containing material, with the area requiring significant remediation to remove the asbestos-containing material. Failure to remove contamination fully can lead to the requirement for specialised, high cost remedial work.

WorkSafe is currently focussing on non-compliant asbestos removal. Enforcement options include suspension or loss of an asbestos removal licence, or other enforcement action as outlined in WorkSafe's Enforcement Policy.

Contributing factors

- The residential building being demolished was constructed in the 1950s, when asbestos was frequently used in construction materials.
- The asbestos-containing material was present in an inaccessible location, and was not visible during a pre-demolition building inspection.
- No further investigation or exploratory testing was carried out prior to demolition works commencing.
- The asbestos-containing material was not shown in the building's construction drawings and there was no other information available to suggest asbestos would be present in this area of the building.
- The licence holder had not adequately trained workers on recognising asbestos-containing materials.



Figure 1: Asbestos-containing debris at a demolition site

Regional Offices

Action required

1. Before commencing demolition work, ensure a competent person conducts an assessment to determine the presence of asbestos and other hazardous materials in the structure. As well as visible material, determine whether asbestos-containing material is present under wall sheeting, cladding, floor coverings, wet area tiles or in other concealed areas.
2. Note that asbestos registers and hazardous materials surveys are generally based on non-intrusive inspections and only contain information on visible materials. Areas of the building that are inaccessible are likely to be out of the scope of asbestos registers or hazardous materials registers.
3. If there is any doubt about whether a material is asbestos-containing, it must either be tested, or presumed to contain asbestos and removed using full asbestos removal procedures.
4. Ensure a site-specific safe work method statement is prepared for high risk construction work.
5. Ensure workers are trained on the hazards of asbestos, how to recognise asbestos-containing materials, safe removal methods, site-specific safe work method statements, as well as applicable information in the Code of Practice for the Safe Removal of Asbestos 2nd Edition [NOHSC:2002(2005)]. Records of training must be kept.
6. If any asbestos-containing material is found, it must be removed prior to demolition commencing. An asbestos removal licence will be required unless the removal is a small quantity (10m² or less) of non-friable asbestos-containing material.
7. If any asbestos-containing material is found during the demolition process, the demolition work must cease and the asbestos-containing material removed before demolition work resumes.
8. Ensure all asbestos removal work is conducted in accordance with Part 9 of the Code of Practice for the Safe Removal of Asbestos 2nd Edition [NOHSC:2002(2005)].
9. Ensure adequate control measures are implemented to control dust.
10. Ensure workers exposed to dust wear adequate personal protective equipment, including respiratory protection.

Further information

Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety

- [WorkSafe's Enforcement Policy](#)
- [Occupational Safety and Health Regulations 1996](#)
- [Removal checklist for non-friable asbestos](#)
- [Finding and selecting an asbestos licence holder](#)
- [Subby pack with sample Safe Work Method Statement](#)
- [Asbestos FAQ](#)

National Occupational Health and Safety Commission

- [Code of Practice for the Safe Removal of Asbestos 2nd Edition \[NOHSC:2002\(2005\)\]](#)

Further information can be obtained from WorkSafe's [website](#), by contacting customer services on 1300 307 877 or email safety@dmirs.wa.gov.au

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