



Asbestos myths and facts

Inhaling one asbestos fibre will cause disease.

This is a myth.

FACT: There is a background level of asbestos in the environment that presents a negligible (very low) risk to health. Health risks are related to a person's asbestos exposure - the higher the exposure, the higher the risks.

Asbestos fibres can be invisible.

This is true.

FACT: Respirable asbestos fibres are extremely small and cannot be seen without a microscope.

Asbestos is no longer used.

This is a myth.

FACT: Asbestos is still used in new products in many countries. Occasionally new products entering Australia contain asbestos even though they may be labelled as asbestos free. Recently asbestos has been found in new imported products, for example in the brake linings/gaskets of quad bikes and in bathroom/kitchen panels in pre-fabricated buildings and other construction materials.

Effects from asbestos exposure will be immediately felt.

This is a myth.

FACT: Asbestos related diseases have a long latency period; that is, they take years to develop (and not all people exposed develop such disease).

White asbestos is less hazardous than blue or brown asbestos.

This is true.

FACT: White asbestos (chrysotile) is considered less hazardous than amphiboles such as blue or brown asbestos, and in particular is less likely to cause mesothelioma. However, white asbestos is hazardous and carcinogenic and should be treated with the same precautions as other forms of asbestos.

Regional Offices

Asbestos has been removed from buildings in Australia.

This is a myth.

FACT: Asbestos is still widely present in existing materials within buildings in Australia and in particular those building built/renovated prior to 1990.

Goods classified overseas as ‘asbestos free’ means the product does not contain asbestos.

This is a myth.

FACT: Some overseas countries classify goods as asbestos free if they meet a certain low level of asbestos. Certification provided to importers from overseas manufacturers that goods are asbestos free has sometimes been proven incorrect. In Australia a product found with any level of asbestos is prohibited (unless in-situ prior to the 2003 asbestos ban).

My building inspection report would have told me if there was any asbestos present

This is a myth.

FACT: It is not mandatory for building inspection reports to identify asbestos. However, an asbestos survey can be specifically requested. As a general guide, if the building was constructed:

- before the mid 1980's - it is highly likely to have asbestos containing materials
- between the mid 1980's and 1990's - it is quite likely to have asbestos containing materials
- after 1990 – it is unlikely to have asbestos containing materials present

Asbestos cement sheeting that is in good condition presents a very low risk to health

This is true

FACT: Asbestos cement sheeting (and other non-friable products of a similar nature) do not pose an increased health risk as long as the products are in good condition, are well maintained and are not disturbed or damaged. However if the asbestos containing products do become damaged or start to deteriorate this increases the likelihood that asbestos fibres may become airborne and it is advisable to have them stabilised or removed by a licenced contractor.

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