

Was your home built before the late 1980s?

If so, it probably contains asbestos. This is something you need to consider if you're thinking of renovating or doing home maintenance.

What is asbestos?

Asbestos is a group of naturally-occurring fibrous minerals found in Australia and around the world.

How common is asbestos?

Asbestos is commonly found in many homes built before the late 1980s. Asbestos minerals have an almost unique combination of chemical and physical properties, which at one time made them very popular in the building industry. Until the mid-1980s, Australia had one of the highest rates of asbestos use per person in the world. Asbestos-containing materials were popular because they were cheap to produce, lightweight, versatile and fire-resistant. Because of this, asbestos may be found in many buildings and everyday consumer items.

We now know that asbestos can be dangerous and may put your health at risk if you are working with it.

Asbestos was gradually phased out of building materials during the 1980s and manufacturing stopped in 1987. Its use was banned completely in Australia after 31 December 2003.

How can I tell if a product or material in my home contains asbestos?

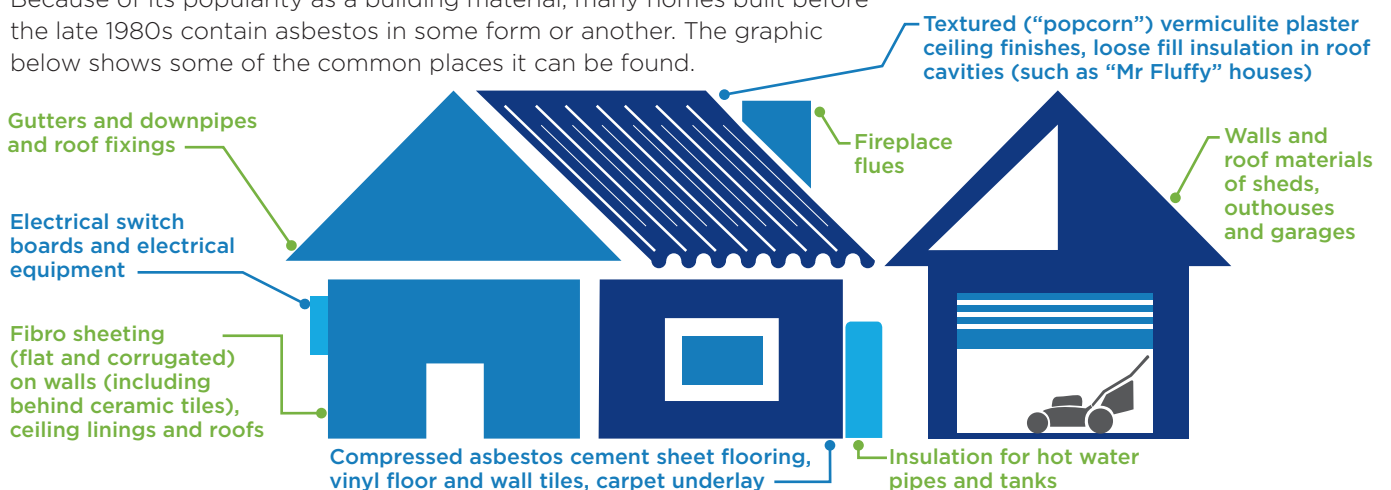
You can't tell if a material contains asbestos just by looking at it. Only scientific testing of a sample can confirm this.

Follow the golden rule – if you think it might be asbestos, treat it like it is.

Engage a competent professional to test the material to confirm whether or not it contains asbestos. This could include professional occupational hygienists (which you can find through a web search) and licensed asbestos assessors (which you can find on the SafeWork NSW website safework.nsw.gov.au). Testing should be conducted by a reputable laboratory, with the results presented on a Certificate of Analysis endorsed by the National Association of Testing Authorities, Australia. The professional assessor can organise this for you.

Where is asbestos in my home?

Because of its popularity as a building material, many homes built before the late 1980s contain asbestos in some form or another. The graphic below shows some of the common places it can be found.



Remnants of asbestos can also be found in soils where old sheds or houses have been demolished in the past.

Types of asbestos

There are two categories of asbestos building materials - “non-friable” and “friable”.



Non-friable (also known as “bonded”) asbestos products are made from a bonding compound (such as cement) mixed with asbestos. They are solid and rigid, with the asbestos fibres tightly bound within them and generally less likely to be released into the air. Examples of non-friable asbestos include asbestos cement (AC) sheeting (fibro) and vinyl asbestos floor tiles.



Friable asbestos products are defined as materials that can be crumbled, pulverised, or reduced to a powder by hand pressure when dry. Typically, asbestos fibres are more easily released into the air from friable products. Examples of friable asbestos include insulation around hot water pipes and asbestos rope.



The circumstances where you can remove asbestos yourself are very limited, and are generally only where there are less than 10 square metres of bonded (non-friable) asbestos. If you are not sure please contact your local council for advice.

If you fall into this category and decide to remove it yourself, you will need to follow strict safety precautions to protect yourself and others before, during and after the removal process.

You will need personal protective equipment (PPE), which can be bought at retail hardware chains, safety shops and other locations, sometimes as a kit. PPE kits contain the necessary protective clothing and accessories for safe removal and disposal of asbestos.

For more detailed information refer to the separate PPE fact sheet or go to asbestos.nsw.gov.au.

What should I do about the asbestos in my home?

Asbestos is usually non-friable in residential buildings, except in the case of roof insulation material. **When it's sealed, undisturbed and in good condition, asbestos-containing material is very low risk** because asbestos fibres cannot be released into the air. It can become a hazard when it's damaged or disturbed.

If you have asbestos in your home and you're not sure whether it is okay to leave it in place, then engage a competent professional to provide you with a risk assessment. If you end up leaving it in place, ensure it is protected and not disturbed. For example, do not drill holes for downlights in asbestos-containing ceilings or eaves. Never use high-pressure water to clean asbestos cement roofs (or any asbestos-containing product). This can result in damage and widespread contamination by releasing asbestos fibres. The clean-up is also very costly.

If you want to have the asbestos removed from your home, or are conducting renovations or rebuilding, **in the majority of cases the law requires you to use a licensed asbestos removalist.** This is also the recommended option in all cases because of the potential health risks involved. You can find a licensed asbestos removalist on the SafeWork NSW website at safework.nsw.gov.au.

Where can asbestos be disposed of safely?

Asbestos waste can only be disposed of at specific landfills throughout NSW. Check the NSW Environment Protection Authority (EPA) website for a list of these landfills, and make sure you call before you go.

Ensure your asbestos waste has been correctly wrapped, sealed and clearly labelled “asbestos waste”. If you engage a licensed asbestos removalist they will do this for you.

For more information on asbestos disposal go to www.epa.nsw.gov.au



Visit asbestos.nsw.gov.au to find out more.

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