

Asbestos awareness during bushfire clean-up

Information for the community

Houses, sheds, buildings and other structures damaged in a bushfire leave health and safety hazards in the remaining debris and ash.

If your fire-damaged building was built before 1990, it is likely to contain asbestos in the form of flat or corrugated sheets (fibro) used for walls, ceilings and roofing, or in products such as pipes, electrical conduit, eaves or vinyl flooring. Further information can be found at asbestos.nsw.gov.au.

Building impact assessment

If a home or building has been damaged by bushfire, a team of experts from NSW Rural Fire Service, Fire and Rescue NSW, Public Works Advisory and the NSW Environment Protection Authority (EPA) conduct assessments of the fire impacted properties to identify hazards, like asbestos, before the clean-up begins.

If asbestos is suspected, the property will often be sprayed with a non-toxic, coloured glue. The glue most commonly used is polyvinyl acetate (PVA). It is mixed with a coloured food dye to make it easy to see. The colour reminds people not to disturb asbestos. Glue is applied to burnt properties as one of several measures to reduce the risk of asbestos exposure. It is used in conjunction with other safety measures such as signage and fencing.

If asbestos is suspected, a licensed asbestos assessor will also take samples to confirm if asbestos is present or absent, where safe to do so.

If asbestos is found

If an assessment team identifies hazards, like asbestos, it will leave a Hazard Identification Notice at the property. The notice doesn't have to stay up, but it indicates which potential hazards have been identified on a property to assist with clean-up. The notice will also say if samples have been taken for testing to confirm it really is asbestos. The NSW Government has appointed Laing O'Rourke to lead the bushfire clean-up.

To request an asbestos test or obtain results of an asbestos test for your property, please email Laing O'Rourke at nswbushfirecleanup@laingorourke.com.au or call 1800 007 539.



A Hazard Identification Notice. Photo: NSW Rural Fire Service

Do not disturb asbestos

Please do not enter a fire-damaged property until it is safe to do so. Breathing in asbestos fibres or getting them on your clothes or shoes puts your health at risk and increases the risk of spreading asbestos fibres in the community.

While about 40% of buildings destroyed in the 2019-20 bushfire season contain asbestos, undisturbed asbestos poses a low risk. This is confirmed from air monitoring since the bushfires.

Watch our video on keeping safe from asbestos after a bushfire at

epa.nsw.gov.au/news/news/2020/bushfire-information.

Clean-up of asbestos

The NSW Government and the Commonwealth are jointly covering the full cost of cleaning up eligible NSW properties used for residential, small business or primary production purposes destroyed by bushfires since 1 July 2019. This includes both insured and uninsured properties. Laing O'Rourke has been appointed to lead the clean-up. The clean-up will include removal of known hazardous materials, such as asbestos.

To register for the bushfire recovery clean-up program call Service NSW on 13 77 88 or go to service.nsw.gov.au.

Timing of clean-up

Bushfire clean-up is being undertaken simultaneously across several bushfire-affected communities in NSW.

Properties with known hazards, such as asbestos, that are also located close to neighbours or community facilities like schools, hospitals and town centres will be prioritised.

Clean-up work will begin only after properties are made safe. This might mean ensuring affected properties in close proximity are also made safe as a priority, to minimise the risk of clean-up work spreading asbestos fibres in the community.

Laing O'Rourke has established offices in bushfire-affected communities. They will manage the clean-up schedule for each area from those offices. For the latest information on Laing O'Rourke's schedule visit their NSW Bushfire clean-up information hub cleanup.lnbr.com.au or call 1800 007 539.

Clean-up process

It is advisable you do not do any clean-up of asbestos yourself.

Asbestos will be removed by a licensed asbestos removalist, who will ensure work is carried out safely. Neighbours in close proximity will be notified by the removalist beforehand. Notification of asbestos removal work is a requirement of a SafeWork NSW Code of Practice.

A licensed asbestos assessor will do air monitoring of the asbestos removal area before and during clean-up. If, at any time, air monitoring shows asbestos above 0.01 fibres/mL, the

removalist will implement further controls to contain asbestos. For information on air monitoring results contact Laing O'Rourke at nswbushfirecleanup@laingorourke.com.au or call 1800 007 539. Anyone can ask for this information.

During clean-up, the removalist will wear protective clothing and wet down any asbestos as a precaution. After the work is completed, protective clothing will be disposed of safely.

When the removalist has finished clean-up of asbestos, they will arrange for the licensed asbestos assessor to do a visual inspection. The assessor will then issue a clearance certificate, which ensures all visible asbestos has been removed from the property. The certificate is given to the property owner.

Asbestos waste disposal

All asbestos waste must be disposed of lawfully at a waste facility authorised to accept it. These facilities have special asbestos controls in place to protect human health and the environment.

You may see more trucks on the road in bushfire-affected communities during clean-up work. Trucks must be covered to stop the spread of any asbestos fibres in the community.

Key contacts

Service NSW – to register for the bushfire recovery clean-up program call 13 77 88 or go to service.nsw.gov.au.

Bushfire clean-up – visit Laing O'Rourke's NSW Bushfire clean-up information hub cleanup.lnbr.com.au or call 1800 007 539.

Asbestos removal – for information about the safe handling and removal of asbestos visit safework.nsw.gov.au.

Asbestos waste transport and disposal – for information about transport and disposal of hazardous materials visit epa.nsw.gov.au.

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Email: info@epa.nsw.gov.au

Website: www.epa.nsw.gov.au

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