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Introduction

Some information in this sheet has been supplied by the Department of Health 'Asbestos Cement Products in your House' Environmental Health Guide available at <http://www.public.health.wa.gov.au/3/1143/2/asbestos.pm>.

The Environmental Health Service at the City of Karratha is responsible for ensuring that contractors who handle asbestos protect the public from the uncontrolled release of fibres into the air.

Definitions

Asbestos is a naturally occurring mineral that has been extensively mined and processed for many commercial uses throughout the world. The three main types of asbestos that have been mined in Australia include:

- White asbestos (chrysotile)
- Blue asbestos (crocidolite)
- Brown asbestos (amosite)

Information and Advice

The Environmental Health Service at the City of Karratha may be able to assist with some identification however it is recommended that an analytical laboratory be engaged to confirm the presence. Please note that any costs associated with the identification of asbestos products are charged to the person making the enquiry. The manufacturers of some asbestos products may also be able to assist with the identification of asbestos cement products. Please contact the Environmental Health Service on (08) 9186 8555 for further assistance.

If you have concerns about renovation or asbestos removal works being conducted near your home, then contact the Environmental Health Service on (08) 9186 8555.

What was it used for?

Asbestos was commonly used in building materials because it was durable, fire resistant and a good insulator. The use of asbestos in building products stopped in 1987; prior to this asbestos was used in a wide range of building materials including:

- Roofing, shingles and sidings
- Water pipes
- Insulation used on hot water pipes, domestic heaters and stoves
- Exterior wall cladding
- Fencing



Asbestos fencing

Occasionally certain areas in the City of Karratha have confirmations of the raw blue asbestos fibres in or on the ground. This most likely originated from mining activity in the area many years ago as both Roebourne and Point Samson were on the transportation routes for the export of asbestos.

What does it look like?

Building materials containing asbestos are difficult to identify. Careful visual examination and the use of an electron microscope is the best way to determine whether a building material contains asbestos.

If you are renovating a building and unsure if the materials contain asbestos it is recommended to treat the building material as though it does contain asbestos.

Blue asbestos fibres in the environment are very distinguishable and can be found in small clumps of matted blue fibrous material or as individual fibres. Please report sightings of raw blue asbestos to the Environmental Health Service.



What harm can it cause?

Undisturbed and sealed asbestos building materials are not a health risk as the fibres are held together in solid cement. Asbestos fibres can only be released into the air if building material or clumps are damaged or disturbed.

As asbestos fibres are small enough to float in the air they may be too small to see but can be breathed in. The risk of developing asbestos related disease (such as asbestosis, pleural plaque, lung cancer and mesothelioma) from breathing in the fibres generally depends on the total number of fibres that have been inhaled. To date, the vast majority of people who have developed asbestos related diseases have been exposed to large numbers of fibres as a result of contact with the material in their job.

Renovating buildings that contain asbestos cement products

Special precautions must be taken when carrying out renovations on buildings that contain asbestos material to prevent the fibres from getting in the air. The use of power tools for cutting, drilling, grinding, sanding or sawing building material that contains asbestos can release a large numbers of fibres.

It is best not to break or disturb building material that contains asbestos, however if this is impossible, these rules must be followed:

- Only cut holes in the building material with non-powered hand tools or a power tool that is specially designed to collect asbestos fibre.
- The building material should be kept wet to reduce the asbestos fibres from floating in the air.
- Personal protective equipment should be worn including a class P1 or P2 disposable mask, disposal coveralls, safety goggles and disposable gloves.
- Any debris must be cleaned up using a wet mop, or a vacuum cleaner that has a special filter (HEPA filter) to collect asbestos fibres. It is important that the debris is not swept, dusted or brushed up. All vacuum bags and waste from the clean up must be treated as asbestos waste and disposed of carefully. Refer to the „How to safely remove and dispose of asbestos building materials“ section for further information.

How to safely remove and dispose of asbestos building materials

Under 10 square metres of bonded (non-friable) asbestos can be removed without a licence. Over 10 square metres must be removed by a licensed and trained individual or business. Removal of any amount of friable asbestos must be done by a licensed person or business. Friable asbestos means asbestos-containing material which, when dry, is or may become crumbled, pulverised or reduced to powder by hand pressure

If you choose to remove the material yourself, you are required to comply with the Health (Asbestos) Regulations 1992.

The following precautions should be taken:

- Remove all furniture and fittings from the room.
- Turn off heating/air conditioning systems.
- Personal protective equipment should be worn including a class P1 or P2 disposable mask, disposal coveralls, safety goggles and disposable gloves.
- The building material should be kept wet to reduce the asbestos fibres from floating in the air.
- Try to remove the asbestos cement products without breaking it. Intentionally breaking asbestos products is illegal and you may be prosecuted. Only use non-powered hand tools.
- Any debris must be cleaned up using a wet mop, or a vacuum cleaner that has a special filter (HEPA filter) to collect asbestos fibres. It is important that the debris is not swept, dusted or brushed up. All vacuum bags and waste must also be treated as asbestos waste and put in with the asbestos cement sheets for disposal.
- Stack the asbestos cement sheets on a double layer of plastic sheeting, then wrap the plastic around the material and seal it into bundles.
- Label or mark the bundles with the words "CAUTION ASBESTOS".
- The asbestos material must then be disposed at the 7 Mile Landfill, Dampier Road, Karratha.

What information do I need to submit?

A permit must be obtained from the Environmental Health Service to dispose of the asbestos at the 7 Mile Landfill. Please contact the Environmental Health Service on (08) 9186 8555.

Fees

Appropriate Building and Refuse fees apply to the demolition or renovation of premises containing asbestos. Both domestic and commercial volumes of asbestos may be disposed of with a City permit and will be charged at the standard hazardous waste disposal rate.

Regulations and Precautions.

All renovation work performed by contractors must comply with the requirements of the Occupational Safety and Health Act 1984 and Regulations. If you have concerns about the health and safety of contractors who are renovating or removing buildings that may contain asbestos materials, contact the WorkSafe Division of the Department of Commerce on (08) 9185 0900.

Disclaimer

This information sheet is provided as generalised information. While we aim to keep the content of this document current and accurate, we accept no responsibility or warranties for actions based on the information provided. The City of Karratha encourages you to seek professional advice before acting on any information contained within this document. Please contact the City of Karratha if you wish to comment on the forms provided and information contained within. Any reported errors will be amended.

If you need more information about any matter raised in this document, please contact the City of Karratha's Environmental Health Service on 9186 8555.