

# THE RISKS OF ASBESTOS AROUND YOUR HOME



Office Hours  
8:30am – 4:30pm  
Monday to Friday

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Every year there is around 2,120 people hospitalised due to malignant Mesothelioma and Asbestosis in Australia. Over 17,000 have died since 1982. Around 145 people die from Asbestos related disease in Western Australia each year.

It had been expected that after a peak of deaths of the miners and installers of asbestos the number of deaths would start reducing. However the opposite has occurred and numbers have increased.

## Why is this?

Asbestos is a very dangerous product. The fibres are light enough to float in the air but when they get into the lungs they embed into the flesh. Once they have embedded into the lungs the body is unable to expel or dissolve them, they cause aggravation and eventually disease in the lungs. Often it takes decades from exposure to asbestos before symptoms appear.

Many now being affected have never worked with asbestos but have come into contact within their own home during renovation, or simply from being in an area where it is being disturbed without the appropriate safety measures being in place. Many of those affected were young children at the time of exposure and the disease becomes evident when they have young children of their own.

**There are many ways you could be exposed to asbestos in the workplace but we will consider 3 common ways you could be affected by asbestos in a residential area:**

## 1. DEMOLITION

Demolishing a building without a Demolition Permit is illegal. The purpose of the demolition Permit is to ensure the building will be demolished in a manner that is safe for the demolition contractors, the owners and neighbours of the property and the waste asbestos sheeting is disposed of safely in an Authorised area.

Owners or demolition contractors that intend to demolish a building must obtain a valid Demolition Permit or a photocopy of such before a demolition can proceed.

Using machinery to demolish an Asbestos building is not permitted. Machinery crushes the Asbestos Fibre sheeting and can cause dust to drift onto neighbouring properties. If not done properly small pieces of asbestos sheeting can contaminate a site. An Asbestos building should not be burnt. Fire releases the fibres and distributes them within the smoke.

The Shire of Chittering will not tolerate the illegal demolition or disposal of asbestos sheeting.

The *Building Act 2011* states the penalty for demolition without a Demolition Permit is a fine of up to \$50,000.00. The *Health (Asbestos) Regulations 1992* have a penalty of up to \$10,000.00 for illegal dumping of asbestos with on the spot fines of up to \$2000.00 for activities such as breaking or cutting asbestos.

The site can also be declared a contaminated site which prevents it being built upon until cleared and certified.

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## 2. NEGLECT

If left unpainted, or the paint has deteriorated over time, asbestos fibre sheeting will start to shed fibres. Rain and wind can erode the substrate and the fibres will become airborne. Asbestos left on the ground will get crushed by traffic or affected by fire and also release the fibres.

All asbestos sheeting should be kept painted. If removed it should be bagged and disposed of at a suitable waste facility. It should not be disposed of with other rubbish.

Vandals also can cause damage to vacant buildings causing risk to themselves and others. The Shire may place an order for demolition or repair on buildings that have been damaged and is causing a risk to the surrounding residents.

## 3. RENOVATION

It is estimated 1/3 of all house built prior to 1990's in Australia contain asbestos. Some sheeting made in the 1980's is very hard to identify as asbestos as looks very similar to Cement/Wood Fibre Board. Asbestos was used in wet areas, under eaves, as an underlay for floor coverings, floor coverings, corrugated roofing and fencing and sometimes all the internal and external lining was Asbestos. When undisturbed and maintained by painting it is not dangerous.

When renovating their home some people have cut doorways through the sheeting or broken a sheet which causes toxic dust. When sheets are removed the dust behind the sheets contains fibres which, when swept it becomes airborne. The dust is breathed in by the residents of the dwelling and coats surfaces and floors in the building. Young children breathe in the fibres and also come in contact with them from the floor and surfaces. This causes disease in the future.

- **If in doubt treat all cement fibre sheeting as asbestos.**
- **Always wear protective clothing and personal safety equipment.**
- **Remove children from the area before starting asbestos removal.**
- **Do not break, cut, drill, or burn asbestos fibre sheeting.**

Remove sheets whole. Pick up all small pieces of asbestos fibre sheeting from site. Do not sweep, use a Vacuum certified for Asbestos for removal of any dust. If at all possible remove whole areas, walls or fences etc. at once. Wrap asbestos immediately in plastic sheeting.

Contact your Shire of Chittering local waste disposal facility and they will advise you of how and where it can be disposed of.

**For further information see Safe Work Australia's guide 'How to Safely Remove Asbestos Code of Practice' (April 2016) at the website link:**

<https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/system/files/documents/1705/mcop-how-to-safely-remove-asbestos-v3.pdf>