



INFORMATION SHEET

BUILDING SERVICES

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IDENTIFYING ASBESTOS ON SITE (NAT)

This information sheet provides guidance on how to find out whether materials containing asbestos are present in a building or structure and the basic matters required to be determined prior to undertaking any asbestos removal work, including removal work that is allowed to be undertaken without a licence.

Where can asbestos be found?

Asbestos was used widely in construction and other products from about the 1950s to the 1980s, many of which are still in place today. Asbestos used in construction ranged from basic building materials such as fibro-cement sheeting, fibro-cement pipes, conduits and flues to floor vinyl, vinyl tiles, mastics, sealants decorative materials, thermal insulation and fire protection. In Australia the use of asbestos in fibro-cement products was phased out by 1987 but the use of asbestos in some products was not discontinued until 2003.

The Model Code of Practice - *How to Manage and Control Asbestos in the Workplace* lists common examples of the materials known to contain asbestos. This code can be downloaded from the Federal Government's Safe Work Australia webpage <http://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/AboutSafeWorkAustralia/WhatWeDo/Publications/Pages/Manage-Control-Asbestos-COP.aspx>

Finding out if asbestos is present

The best way to ascertain whether or not asbestos is present in a building or other structure is to ask the owner/occupier for the Asbestos Register for the premises. Asbestos registers contain relevant information regarding any asbestos present, such as location, amount, type, condition, risk etc., and are required by law for premises other than domestic premises in most states and territories. Some states contain provisions requiring asbestos to be deemed as present if there is no asbestos register or if there is doubt about the absence of asbestos. In such cases a competent person (a licenced assessor is required in the ACT) should establish whether or not asbestos is present and produce an Asbestos Register.

Prior to undertaking any activity that may affect asbestos (e.g., demolition, refurbishment or asbestos removal work) it is also a requirement to assess whether the asbestos is classed as "friable" or "non-friable/bonded". This is a key determinant of whether or not the asbestos can be removed without a licence, the type of licence required and the safety provisions applicable for its removal. These details can be found in the Asbestos Register for the premises.

DISCLAIMER - The above is intended to provide general information in summary form. The contents do not constitute specific advice and should not be relied upon as such. Formal specific advice should be sought by members with respect to particular matters before taking action.

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Is asbestos “friable” or “non-friable / bonded”?

Asbestos is typically referred to as either friable or non-friable (or “bonded”).

- **Friable asbestos** - is material that contains asbestos which when dry can be crumbled, pulverised or reduced to powder by hand pressure. Examples include sprayed asbestos coating or insulation, asbestos lagging, loose asbestos and in its raw form. This may include asbestos which ends up in this state because of weathering, physical damage or deterioration under its conditions of use.
- **Non-friable or bonded** - includes material that contains asbestos in a form where the asbestos fibre is held within another material but does not include friable asbestos. An example of non-friable asbestos is where asbestos is ‘bonded’ within a matrix such as cement or resin/binders, examples are vinyl floor tiles, fibro-cement flat and corrugated sheets and fibro-cement flue, conduit and drainage pipes

Exact definitions of friable/non-friable vary from State to State and some may deem some types of asbestos to be friable for removal licensing and other regulatory purposes, so check with your state OHS authority to determine how the asbestos is classed.

For further information HIA members can contact HIA’s Building Services staff on 1300 650 620 or hia_technical@hia.com.au.

If you would like to become a HIA member, contact 1300 650 620 or enquiry@hia.com.au