

Asbestos and family day care



Asbestos was a common building material used in housing construction in every State and Territory across Australia prior to 1985. Areas such as house eaves, roofs, sheds, wet areas such as bathrooms, kitchens and laundries as areas where asbestos is most likely to have been used.

When asbestos is in good condition and left alone, it presents no health risks. **Asbestos becomes a health risk when asbestos fibres are released into the air and inhaled.**

Common situations carers need to be aware of, in which fibres may be disturbed and released into the air, include the natural deterioration of the materials due to exposure to weather, and building and maintenance related activities such as:

- demolition
- electrical maintenance and installation including work on electrical meter boards
- flooring maintenance and installation
- building renovation and maintenance work – commonly occurring as kitchen/laundry and bathroom/renovations, replacement or repair of wall and ceiling linings, other additions or alterations work
- painting and coating/sealing of materials containing asbestos

It is very important that materials containing asbestos are handled by qualified professionals to avoid health risks. Lists of registered professionals who can do house assessments if required, remove asbestos or provide training are available through the work safe websites listed for each State.

State, Territory and Commonwealth governments are taking the potential risk to the health of people from exposure to asbestos fibres, contained in all building materials produced prior to 1985, seriously.

For that reason each State and Territory has laws in place that endorse or implement the Australian Safety and Compensation Council Code of Practice for the Management and Control of Asbestos in Workplaces [NOHSC:2018 (2005)] April 2005. www.asc.gov.au.

Each State has complied by various legislative tools that are administered by Building/Planning, Occupational Health and Safety and Workcover Authorities.

State authorities do not require owners of residential premises to get 'asbestos assessments'.

However, there are obligations for carers due to the definition of a 'workplace'.

In each State, a residence is a 'workplace' if a business, such as family day care, is being conducted there. Furthermore, any person with 'control' of a workplace has a duty of care to comply with their State or Territory Acts, Regulations and Standards.

Generally this requires carers to include asbestos in their risk management plans. Carer plans should:

- **identify** any material containing asbestos (MCA) in the home (or if unable to, assume it is material containing asbestos. *A good guide is the ACT table of asbestos usage in homes based on the age of ACT properties.*
http://www.asbestos.act.gov.au/resources/pdfs/AA_Colour_HR.pdf

- **assess** the risks posed by the identified MCA; *if it is in good condition and left undisturbed it **does not** pose a health risk. Most MCA around Australian homes is usually in good condition. If you suspect it is not in good condition arrange for appropriate removal or maintenance by a licensed contractor*
- **manage** the risk by checking over the MCA to ensure it stays in good condition and ensuring the use of safe work practices when doing minor repairs
- **review** the risk assessment and the control plan periodically.

A sample risk management plan can be downloaded from:

<http://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/WorkSafe/Home/Forms%20and%20Publications/Tools/Safety%20Action%20Plan>

If you are planning renovations which disturb any materials containing asbestos, it presents a risk to yourself and your clients. In these situations MCA work safe sites suggest the minimising of exposure to any dust particles and wearing of disposable mask and clothing.

Removing more than 10 square metres of asbestos in most States requires not only safe handling, but also consultation with a suitably qualified asbestos assessor and notification of local Councils before the materials can be disposed of. Trades people doing such work should be licensed and knowledgeable of these requirements.

A good renovator's guide for working with asbestos containing materials can be found at:

http://www.health.qld.gov.au/asbestos/documents/asbestos_book_07.pdf

For specific requirements for each State and Territory see the FDCA website
www.fdca.com.au