



INFORMATION SHEET NO. 4

ASBESTOS

What is asbestos?

Asbestos is the generic term for a number of fibrous silicate minerals. There are two major groups of asbestos – the **amphibole** group, which includes blue (crocidolite) and brown (amosite) asbestos and the **serpentine** group, which includes white asbestos (chrysotile). All forms of asbestos are classified as human carcinogens (cancer causing) and exposure can cause asbestosis, lung cancer and mesothelioma.

All asbestos is banned in Australia.

What is asbestos used for?

Serpentine group

Chrysotile is the only form of asbestos that has been used commercially from the serpentine group. Chrysotile was banned on 31 December 2003. In the past it has been used in the manufacture of:-

- asbestos cloth, tapes, ropes and gaskets for packing and in thermal and chemical insulation;
- asbestos cement sheets and pipes for construction, casing for water;
- electrical/telecommunication services;
- rubber, plastics, thermosetting resins, adhesives, paints, coatings, caulking compounds;
- sealants for thermal, electrical and insulation applications;
- fire-rated doors, equipment and structural beams of buildings;
- fillers and filters; and
- packing and friction material such as gaskets, brake and clutch linings.

Amphibole group

Amosite and crocidolite were used in many products until the early 1980s. The use of all types of asbestos in the amphibole group was banned in the mid 1980's. These products were mainly:-

- asbestos cement sheets and pipes for construction, casing for water;
- electrical/telecommunication services (crocidolite asbestos was rarely used in cement sheets); and
- thermal and chemical insulation eg. fire rated doors, limpet spray, lagging and gaskets.

What are the risks associated with asbestos?

Asbestos becomes a health risk when asbestos fibres are released into the air and inhaled. Exposure to asbestos fibres can cause asbestosis, lung cancer and mesothelioma. This does not automatically mean that your health is at risk if you find that your home, workplace or vehicle contains materials made from asbestos. The risk to health increases as the number of fibres inhaled increases, that is, the health risk is related to the dose (the dose is related to the amount of airborne asbestos fibres inhaled and the length of exposure). The diseases associated with asbestos are characterised by long latency periods. It may take up to 40 years between initial exposure and the onset of the disease.

Health problems usually occur when people are unaware of the hazards of working with asbestos containing products. It is important when working with asbestos that there is minimal release of dust or small particles from the asbestos containing material. By using your commonsense and following safety guidelines, asbestos containing products should not be a problem.

Are there any uses of chrysotile that are not banned?

The ban does not include:-

- bona fide research or analysis;
- removal or disposal (in accordance with South Australia's Approved Code of Practice) by a licensed operator where this is appropriate and as described in the Asbestos Regulations in the *Occupational Health, Safety and Welfare Regulations 1995*;
- where it is encountered during non-asbestos mining or quarrying;
- display of an item in a museum or for historical display;
- 'in situ' chrysotile products – meaning that all raw materials or products containing asbestos in good condition already in place before 31 December 2003 can stay in place until they need to be disturbed or replaced. When replaced, it must be with non-chrysotile alternatives and the chrysotile products must be removed and disposed of in accordance with South Australia's safe disposal requirements as described in the *Occupational Health, Safety and Welfare Regulations 1995*; and
- where there is a nationally agreed and time limited specified exception (see below).

Do I need to remove asbestos containing materials that are fixed or installed in my home, workplace or vehicle?

No. Asbestos containing materials or products that are fixed or installed and are in good condition may be left in place until they are disturbed or damaged. At this point the asbestos materials must be removed and any removal must strictly comply with the Asbestos Regulations and the relevant Approved Code of Practice.

How do I transport and dispose of waste asbestos, including chrysotile products?

Advice on the transport and disposal of asbestos waste must be obtained from the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) on (08) 8204 2004.

Can transportable houses and building structures containing asbestos products be transported?

SafeWork SA has a strict policy relating to the transportation of asbestos containing transportable buildings. If you are considering moving such a building please contact SafeWork SA for more information.

Council do not identify asbestos, a consultant or firm specializing in asbestos management, identification and registers is required to undertake this task.

Further Information

For information on the legislation governing asbestos, working with asbestos, the disposal of asbestos, or licensed asbestos contractors contact:-

Safework SA Help Centre
1300 365 255

SafeWork SA Mineral Fibres Unit
Telephone: (08) 8303 0405

Environmental Protection Authority (EPA)
Telephone: (08) 8204 2004

www.safework.sa.gov.au

*Please note the information contained herein is intended as a guide only.
Further clarification may be obtained by contacting the Council on 8525 3200.*