

**WORKSAFE**

Mahi Haumaru Aotearoa

# Asbestos in the home

## Information for homeowners

### Consultation draft September 2023

**When reviewing this draft guidance please note the following:**

- This draft guidance forms part of a wider suite of asbestos related guidance currently under development.
- Please see: [WorkSafe's Consultation webpage](#) for more information on the other pieces of asbestos guidance under development.
- This draft does not necessarily present WorkSafe's final position on any matters contained within it.
- The current Approved Code of Practice: Management and removal of asbestos, and other published guidance should still be referred to as WorkSafe's primary guidance for managing asbestos.
- Please use the submission feedback form provided on [WorkSafe's Consultation webpage](#) to provide your feedback.

**Submissions close Monday 2 October 2023**

Completed submission forms can be sent to:

[guidanceandeducationdevelopment@worksafe.govt.nz](mailto:guidanceandeducationdevelopment@worksafe.govt.nz)

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## 1.0 About this information

### 1.1 What is this information about?

This information provides advice about what you should do if you think there could be asbestos in your home, or if you find asbestos in your home.

This information is for anyone that might have asbestos in their home or on their property. It might also be useful for:

- residential landlords
- anyone that carries out asbestos surveys, removal, or assessment work
- anyone that provides health and safety advice about asbestos.

In this document, 'you' means anyone living in a home or on a property that might have asbestos (for example, a homeowner or a tenant).

### 1.2 Your duties under the Health and Safety at Work Act 2015

If you pay someone to undertake work on asbestos in your home, your home becomes a 'workplace' for the duration of this work. Under the Health and Safety at Work Act 2015 (HSWA), you will be an 'other person at the workplace'.

You must take reasonable care for your own health and safety and make sure you do not put others at risk by your actions or inactions. You must also follow any reasonable instructions from the businesses doing the work.

You can read more about other persons at the workplace on the WorkSafe website: [What to know about 'other persons' at work | WorkSafe](#)

If you, a family member, or a friend is helping with work on or around your home, they will not have duties under HSWA. You should still make sure that everyone:

- takes reasonable care for their own health and safety, and
- does not do anything to put themselves or others in danger while they work.

You can read more about HSWA and working on your own home on the WorkSafe website: [Policy clarification: Information for people building a house or working on their own home | WorkSafe](#)

### 1.3 Residential landlords

Under HSWA, residential landlords must make sure that work carried out at their property is done safely.

If there is a risk that workers or other people (including tenants) could be exposed to asbestos fibres when work is carried out, residential landlords must:

- identify the asbestos in their property, and
- prepare an asbestos management plan for work that has a risk of exposure to asbestos.

You can read more about the duties residential landlord have to manage asbestos on the WorkSafe website: [Policy clarification: Residential landlords and asbestos | WorkSafe](#)

#### **1.4 The role of WorkSafe New Zealand**

WorkSafe is New Zealand's primary work health and safety regulator. WorkSafe aims to make sure that every New Zealander that goes to work comes home healthy and safe.

To achieve this aim, WorkSafe:

- **educates** people about their responsibilities and rights (for example, by producing guidance documents)
- **engages** with businesses, organisations, workers, and others to promote improvements in health and safety practice and investigate events
- **enforces** health and safety law.

One of WorkSafe's roles is to regulate asbestos in the workplace. The workplace includes your home when work or repairs are done by a contractor.

Contractors who work in your home also have duties to make sure you are not exposed to asbestos while doing work in your home.

You can read more about WorkSafe's role on the WorkSafe website: [WorkSafe's role as a regulator | WorkSafe](#)

#### **1.5 More information about asbestos in New Zealand and asbestos legislation**

For more information about the health risks of asbestos and the history of asbestos management in New Zealand see: [\[placeholder for Asbestos in New Zealand QG\]](#)

For more information about the laws and regulations governing asbestos in New Zealand see: [\[placeholder for Asbestos Special Guide\]](#)

## 2.0 What is asbestos?

### 2.1 What is asbestos?

Asbestos is a heat-resistant, fire-resistant, and insulating mineral that was commonly used in building materials.

Asbestos is made up of tiny fibres. When asbestos is disturbed or breaks down, asbestos fibres can be released into the air.

All forms of asbestos are harmful to humans.

### 2.2 Types of asbestos

Asbestos can be classified into two categories based on its condition:

- **Friable asbestos** is flaky or powdery and can be crumbled or reduced to a powder without much pressure. Friable asbestos can easily release fibres into the air.
- **Non-friable asbestos** usually has asbestos fibres bonded into another material such as cement. Non-friable asbestos is less likely to release asbestos fibres into the air unless it is disturbed or has started to deteriorate.

#### Remember

Airborne asbestos fibres are often too small to be seen with the naked eye. Even if you cannot see any dust particles in the air, asbestos fibres may still be present.

### 2.3 What problems can asbestos cause?

When asbestos fibres are released into the air, they can be breathed in easily. Breathing in asbestos fibres can cause them to get trapped in your lungs, leading to serious health issues.

Asbestos fibres in the lungs cause several diseases, including:

- cancers (for example, lung cancer and mesothelioma)
- serious long-term lung conditions (for example, asbestosis).

Diseases caused by asbestos often cannot be cured. They can cause severe symptoms and can be life-threatening.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, more than 200 people die each year from diseases caused by asbestos.

#### Remember

Even a single exposure to asbestos fibres, especially in high concentrations, can cause serious health problems later in life.

## 3.0 Identifying asbestos in your home

### 3.1 You cannot tell if something contains asbestos just by looking at it

It is very difficult to tell the difference between building materials that contain asbestos and building materials that do not. For example, cement that contains asbestos can look identical to cement that does not contain asbestos.

The only way to confirm that something is asbestos is to test a sample of it. Asbestos sampling should only be done by a professional, or if directed by a professional.

### 3.2 Where you could find asbestos in your home

Many buildings in Aotearoa New Zealand have asbestos in them. If your home was built before 1 January 2000, it probably contains some asbestos materials.

Table 1 and Figure 1 below show some of the places where asbestos can be found in the home.

Textured ceilings	Asbestos was often used in textured ceilings (for example, Glamatex or Whisper) for soundproofing and fire-resistance.
Wall and ceiling panels and sheeting	Asbestos cement (for example, Fibrolite) was commonly used in wet areas like kitchens, bathrooms, toilets, and laundry areas.
Backing for wall tiles and splashbacks	Asbestos can sometimes be found in the backing material of wall tiles, bath panels, and splashbacks in kitchens and bathrooms.
Carpet underlay	Some older carpet underlays may contain asbestos fibres.
Patching compounds and textured paint	Asbestos was sometimes used in patching compounds and textured paints for durability and fire resistance.
Vinyl floor tiles and linoleum backing	Asbestos can sometimes be found in vinyl floor tiles or in the felt backing of vinyl and linoleum flooring.
Particle board	Asbestos flooring can sometimes be found underneath particle board.
Insulation	Asbestos was used for insulation in heaters, fireplaces, stoves, roof cavities, and around hot water pipes because of its heat resistance.
Roof sheeting and ridge capping	Asbestos cement was often used in roof sheeting and ridge capping for its durability and weather resistance.
Gutters, downpipes, gables, and eaves	Asbestos can sometimes be found in gutters, downpipes, gables, and eaves (including the lining under eaves).

Electrical switchboards	Older electrical switchboards may contain asbestos as an insulating material.
Water pipes and flues	Asbestos was used to insulate water pipes and flues because it is resistant to heat.
Cladding	Asbestos can be found in some cladding materials for walls, including imitation brick cladding.
Fencing, carports, garages, outhouses, and garden sheds	Asbestos cement was often used in the construction of fences, carports, garages, outhouses, and garden sheds because it is durable and weather resistant.

Table 1: Some of the areas where asbestos can be found in homes

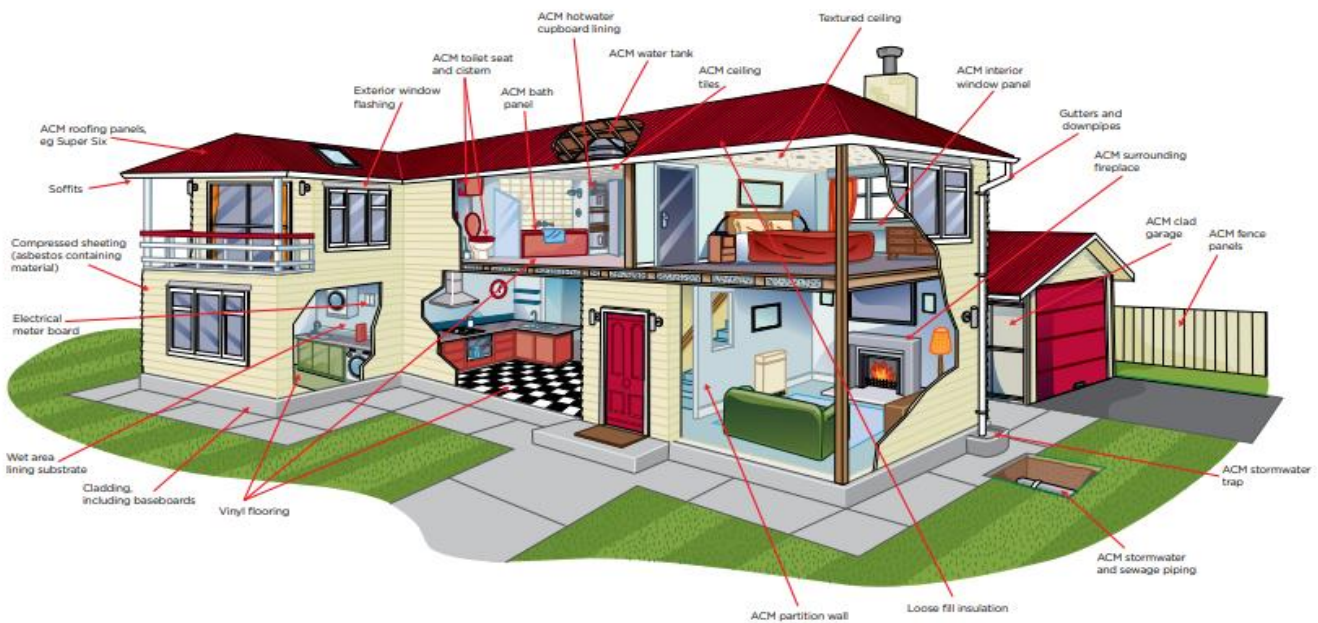


Figure 1: Areas where asbestos is commonly found in homes

### 3.3 Always check for asbestos before you start doing any work in your home

Asbestos fibres can be released into the air by many different types of work. This includes large jobs such as demolition, relocation, and refurbishment and small jobs like minor repairs and maintenance.

If you find asbestos, or suspect something might be asbestos, do not disturb it in any way. Contact a professional – they can help you to manage it safely.



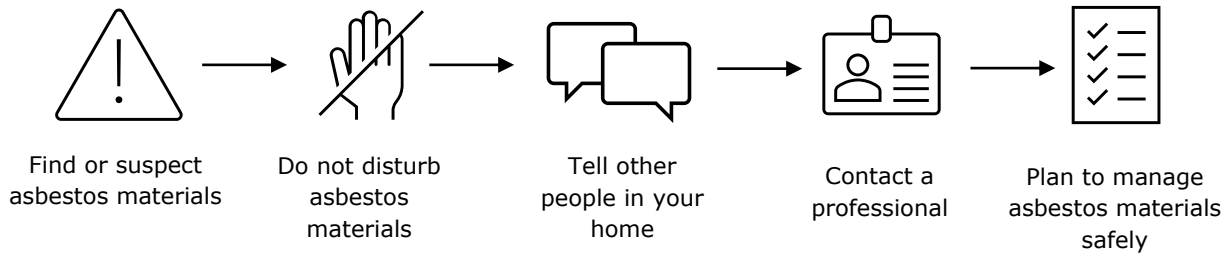


Figure 2: What to do if you find or suspect asbestos

**Remember**

If you are not sure if something contains asbestos, treat it as if it is asbestos.

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## 4.0 What to do if you find or suspect asbestos

### 4.1 Plan to manage asbestos materials safely

If material in your home is confirmed to be asbestos, you will need to decide how to manage it.

The best way to manage asbestos material in your home will depend on several factors, including:

- how much asbestos material is present
- what condition the asbestos material is in
- where the asbestos material is and how easy it is to access.

An asbestos contractor can give you information about the best way to manage the asbestos in your home.

### 4.2 Do not disturb asbestos materials

The risk of harm from asbestos depends on its condition and how easily fibres are released into the air.

Asbestos fibres are more likely to be released into the air if asbestos materials are:

- friable (flaky, powdery, or easy to crumble)
- in poor condition (for example, if they are flaking, peeling, or crumbling)
- disturbed in any way (for example, sanded, drilled, cut, or water blasted).

#### **Remember**

Non-friable (or bonded) asbestos materials generally do not release asbestos fibres if they are in good condition and are not disturbed.

### 4.3 Contact a professional

An asbestos contractor can confirm whether a material is asbestos and can assess the risk.

If you find or suspect asbestos is in your home:

- contact a local asbestos industry professional for advice, or
- contact a local health protection officer for advice. Contact information for your nearest public health office is available on the Ministry of Health website: [Public health contacts | Ministry of Health NZ](#)

### 4.4 What to do if you accidentally disturb asbestos

If you accidentally disturb asbestos, follow the steps below.

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### STOP WHAT YOU ARE DOING

- Disturbing the asbestos further will cause more fibres to be released into the air.
- Tell other people in the area what has happened. Keep other people and pets out of the area.

### MINIMISE THE SPREAD OF FIBRES

- Seal off the area by making sure doors and windows are closed.
- Leave the area where the asbestos has been disturbed.
- Wipe yourself down carefully with damp rags. Do not rub yourself down with a brush or with your hands.

### REMOVE CONTAMINATED CLOTHING

- Remove the top layer of your clothes, turning them inside out if possible. Do not shake them.
- Put the clothes and any used damp rags into a plastic bag and tie it up. Put the plastic bag into another plastic bag and tie it up.

### CONTACT A PROFESSIONAL

- Contact an asbestos industry professional or your local health protection officer. Tell them what has happened and ask them how to dispose of the contaminated clothes and rags.
- Do not re-enter the area where asbestos has been disturbed until you have been told it is safe.

#### **4.5 What to do if you have been exposed to asbestos**

The health problems caused by asbestos take many years to develop. It is very unlikely that you will quickly become sick from asbestos after being exposed to it.

If you think you have been exposed to asbestos, or if you are told you have been exposed:

- tell your local GP at your next regular appointment
- consider registering with the WorkSafe Asbestos Exposure Database (AED). You can find more information about the AED on the WorkSafe website: [Asbestos exposure registration | WorkSafe](#)

You can read more about the health effects of asbestos exposure on the Manatū Hauora – Ministry of Health website: [Asbestos advice for householders | Ministry of Health NZ](#)

## 5.0 Asbestos industry professionals

### 5.1 Types of asbestos professionals

Hiring an asbestos contractor is the safest way to help manage any asbestos found in your home.

Asbestos contractors often work in specific areas of asbestos management. Table 2 outlines some of the professionals you might come across if you need help to manage asbestos in your home.

Asbestos industry professional	What they do
Asbestos surveyors	<p>Asbestos surveyors are trained to identify asbestos.</p> <p>You should expect an asbestos surveyor to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- gather information about your home (for example, when it was built)</li> <li>- carry out a visual inspection of the building and any areas of suspected asbestos</li> <li>- take samples of suspected asbestos materials</li> <li>- provide you with a report of their findings.</li> </ul>
Asbestos removalists	<p>Asbestos removalists are trained to safely remove and dispose of asbestos.</p> <p>You should expect an asbestos removalist to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- assess the work that needs to be done (for example, the type, amount, and location of asbestos materials) using the surveyor report</li> <li>- make a work plan that explains the removal process and the safety measures that they will use</li> <li>- follow strict safety procedures and use specialised equipment to remove asbestos materials without releasing large amounts of harmful fibres into the air</li> <li>- correctly dispose of asbestos waste.</li> </ul>
Asbestos assessors	<p>Asbestos assessors are trained to make sure that asbestos removal work has been completed to the required standard.</p> <p>You should expect an asbestos assessor to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- be from a different business to the asbestos removalist (that is, they should be independent)</li> <li>- review the work plan made by the asbestos removalist to make sure it is safe and suitable</li> <li>- inspect the area where asbestos material was removed from</li> <li>- collect samples of the air to test for asbestos fibres</li> </ul>

- |  |   |
|--|---|
|  | - confirm in writing that the area is safe to re-enter. |
|--|---|

Table 2: Asbestos industry contractors that might be involved with managing asbestos in the home

## 5.2 What you should tell your asbestos contractor

When you contact an asbestos contractor, they will likely ask you questions about your home and any asbestos material you may have found.

Try to be prepared with as much information about your home as possible. This can help the asbestos contractor to understand your situation and plan the work that needs to be done.

It can be helpful if you take photos of any suspected asbestos, but only if you can do so without disturbing it.

Questions that an asbestos contractor might ask you include:

- When was your home built?
- Have there been any renovations, refurbishments, or extensions? When were they built?
- Where have you found asbestos material?
- What does the asbestos material look like?
- Roughly how much asbestos material can you see?
- What condition is the asbestos material in?
- Is there anything blocking the area that could make accessing the asbestos material difficult?
- Are there any parking restrictions, entry restrictions, or obstacles that could affect access to your home?

## 5.3 Choosing an asbestos contractor

Take the time to choose a reputable asbestos contractor that you are comfortable with and that can do the job well.

Hiring a reputable asbestos contractor can help to make sure that work on asbestos in your home is done safely and to a high standard.

A reputable asbestos contractor should act with integrity and do their work in a way that shows professionalism and care to their workers and other people.

When you are choosing a contractor for work on asbestos on your home, think about:

### REVIEWS AND REFERENCES

- A reputable asbestos contractor should be able to provide you with reviews, testimonials, or references from other customers. This should help you to understand the quality of their work and how professional they are.
- You can also search for reviews online to see what other people have experienced when they have hired the contractor.

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### EXPERIENCE AND QUALIFICATIONS

- A reputable asbestos contractor will be experienced in carrying out work on asbestos effectively and safely. They should be able to tell you about the experience they have doing similar work.
- A reputable asbestos contractor should also be able to provide you with information about the qualifications of their workers.

### CERTIFICATION AND LICENSING

- Asbestos assessors must be licenced by WorkSafe New Zealand. Depending on the type of removal work that needs to be done, asbestos removalists may also need to be licenced.
- You can search the registers on the WorkSafe website to verify the licensing of assessors and removalists: [Licence holder register | WorkSafe](#)

### INSURANCE

- A reputable asbestos contractor should be able to provide you with details about their public liability and indemnity insurance.

### COST

- Cost is an important factor, but it should not be the only thing you consider when you are choosing an asbestos contractor. A contractor that offers the lowest price may not necessarily provide the highest quality service.
- Look for a contractor that offers a good balance of cost and quality. Getting multiple quotes can help you spot rates that are unusually high or low.

#### **5.4 What you should receive from an asbestos contractor**

An asbestos contractor should provide you with all the information you need to decide whether to go ahead with the work.

The asbestos contractor should give you this information in writing as a formal quote or work plan.

A formal quote or work plan should include details about:

- what work will be done
- any tests or inspections that need to be done
- how long the work will take
- how much the work will cost
- any warranties or guarantees that will cover the work and materials
- what safety measures will be used to protect you and any workers in your home
- what disruptions there will be to your living space while the work is going on.

The quote you receive from your asbestos contractor may highlight work that needs to be done by other tradespeople.

This means you might need to hire other tradespeople for parts of the job.

Consider this when you are thinking about the cost of the work.

## 5.5 Doing work on asbestos by yourself

WorkSafe strongly recommends that you seek the help of a professional if you need to remove or work on any asbestos material in your home.

If you have no option but to do the work yourself, you should follow safe work practices to minimise the risk of harm to yourself and other people in your home.

### Remember

Attempting to remove or work on asbestos materials without specialist training is extremely dangerous. It can create a major health hazard for you and others in your home.

Working on asbestos materials without proper training can cause problems that might be very expensive to fix. It can also put tradespeople at risk of exposure to asbestos.

It can be safer and more cost effective to hire an asbestos contractor from the start.

You can find out more about safe work practices when dealing with asbestos in your home on the Manatū Hauora – Ministry of Health website: [Dealing with asbestos in the home | Ministry of Health NZ](#)

## 5.6 Disposing of asbestos waste

Asbestos waste needs to be disposed of at an authorised disposal site. If you hire an asbestos contractor, they will dispose of asbestos waste for you.

If you choose to do work on asbestos yourself, you will need to dispose of any asbestos waste safely.

Before removing any asbestos, talk to your local council to find out:

- where to find a tip (rubbish dump) that accepts asbestos waste, and
- how to transport your asbestos waste to the tip.

We recommend that you call your local council several days ahead to let them know that you are disposing of asbestos waste, so they can prepare.

## 6.0 Natural disasters and fires

Asbestos materials can be disturbed if your home is damaged by a fire or a natural disaster (for example, a flood, earthquake, landslide, or cyclone).

If this happens, asbestos fibres can be released into the air and can contaminate the surrounding area.

### 6.1 Preparing for a natural disaster or fire

If you know there is asbestos material in your home, you should keep equipment in your emergency bag to help keep yourself and your whānau safe. This equipment could include:

- P3 or N95 face masks
- disposable coveralls, boot covers, and gloves
- thick plastic disposal bags
- water spray and wet wipes.

Keep the instructions for any equipment in your emergency bag. If you need to use the equipment, follow the instructions carefully.

### 6.2 What to do if there is a natural disaster or fire

If asbestos materials have been disturbed in your home after a fire or natural disaster:

- follow the instructions given by emergency or clean-up professionals
- tell other people in the area that asbestos materials have been disturbed
- avoid going into the contaminated area
- seal off the contaminated area if possible.

If it is not possible to avoid the contaminated area:

- wear a P3 or N95 face mask to help minimise the number of asbestos fibres that you inhale
- wear protective clothing (for example, coveralls, gloves, and boot covers).



## 7.0 More information

### 7.1 Manatū Hauora – Ministry of Health

Manatū Hauora has an important role in monitoring the performance and outcomes achieved by New Zealand's health system. Manatū Hauora aims to make sure that the health system delivers the best possible health services to New Zealanders.

To achieve this aim, Manatū Hauora works to:

- advise the Government on policy
- regulate the health system to make sure it performs well and delivers better health outcomes for everyone.

You can read more about Manatū Hauora's role on the Manatū Hauora website: [What we do | Ministry of Health NZ](#)

### 7.2 Other information

WorkSafe information

[WorkSafe's role as a regulator | WorkSafe](#)

[Policy clarification: Residential landlords and asbestos | WorkSafe](#)

[Policy clarification: Information for people building a house or working on their own home | WorkSafe](#)

[Licence holder register | WorkSafe](#)

[Asbestos exposure registration | WorkSafe](#)

Manatū Hauora – Ministry of Health information

[Asbestos advice for householders | Ministry of Health NZ](#)

Te Whatu Ora – Health New Zealand information

[Asbestos – Te Whatu Ora - Health New Zealand](#)

[Public Health Contacts – Te Whatu Ora - Health New Zealand](#)