



# ASBESTOS: FACT VS MYTH

## *Manufacturing and using asbestos is banned in Australia*

### **FACT**

All types of asbestos were prohibited in Australian workplaces from 31 December 2003. This ban is reflected in work health and safety laws in all states.

The prohibition on the use of asbestos in Australia is supplemented by the Customs (Prohibited Imports) Regulations 1956. These ban the importing of all types of asbestos and products containing asbestos, except under limited circumstances.

Asbestos is still widely used in some countries. Despite being a prohibited import in Australia, goods containing asbestos are still being located at the border. Certification provided to importers from overseas manufacturers that goods are asbestos-free has sometimes been proven incorrect or unreliable.

Local standards in some countries may classify goods 'asbestos free' if they meet a certain low level of asbestos content. In Australia, a product found with *any* level of asbestos is prohibited. Importers should be aware of the varying definitions and standards applied in the country of origin and/or supply. The Australian Regulations will apply at the border.

## ***Asbestos is mainly found outside the home***

### **MYTH**

While it's common to find asbestos outside of the home in Australia, there are many places that asbestos was used before the mid-1980s inside the home as well.

The use of asbestos-containing materials (ACMs) in the home has been extensive. There are many areas where ACMs can be found, such as:

- // carpet and tile underlays
- // carports and sheds
- // concrete formwork
- // expansion joints
- // fencing
- // flexible building boards
- // guttering
- // imitation brick cladding
- // packing under beams
- // roof sheeting and capping
- // telecommunications pits
- // vinyl sheet flooring
- // wall sheeting (flat or a weatherboard style)
- // waterproof membrane

### ***Inhaling asbestos fibres can be associated with diseases including asbestosis, lung cancer and mesothelioma***

### **FACT**

Disturbing any amount of asbestos can release fibres into the air. These could be inhaled or swallowed, which may lead to diseases such as asbestosis or mesothelioma in later years.

Asbestos must be removed using appropriate personal protective equipment and safety precautions such as containment to ensure that asbestos fibres do not contaminate other areas of the home or workplace.

Untrained people should have asbestos removed by a licensed asbestos removalist, rather than attempting to remove it themselves. To find one, go to [www.worksafe.tas.gov.au](http://www.worksafe.tas.gov.au) and search for 'asbestos removalist search'.

Even limited or short-term exposure to asbestos fibres can be dangerous, but exposure does not make development of an asbestos-related disease inevitable. There is still much that is unknown about why some people are susceptible to asbestos-related diseases, while others who have been regularly exposed to asbestos may avoid them.

## ***Asbestos has been used in more than 3,000 applications worldwide***

### **FACT**

The versatility of asbestos made it attractive to many industries; it's thought to have more than 3,000 applications worldwide. Many people are unaware of the full range of materials that contain asbestos found in and around Australian homes.

Australia was one of the highest users per capita in the world up until the mid-1980s. Approximately one third of all homes built in Australia contain asbestos products. The widespread use of asbestos has left a deadly legacy.

## ***My building inspection report would have told me if there was asbestos present***

### **MYTH**

It's not mandatory for building inspection reports to identify asbestos in the home (and the seller is not obliged to tell you if the house contains asbestos, either).

Therefore, it's possible that asbestos may be present in your home, especially if it was built before 1985.

As a general guide, if your house was built:

- /// before the mid-1980s: it's highly likely it contains some asbestos products
- /// between the mid-1980s and 1990: it's likely it would contain asbestos
- /// after 1990: it's unlikely it would contain asbestos.

It's important to know where asbestos is in your home and to monitor its condition.

It's recommended that a licenced asbestos assessor inspect the property before any renovations take place. To find one, go to [www.worksafe.tas.gov.au](http://www.worksafe.tas.gov.au) and search for 'asbestos assessor search'.

## ***Only people who worked heavily with asbestos will get an asbestos disease***

### **MYTH**

While exposure doesn't make developing an asbestos-related disease inevitable, even limited or short-term exposure to asbestos fibres can be dangerous.

Many victims of asbestos-related disease in the past were the children and wives of workers who brought asbestos home on their clothes. There is no safe level of exposure to asbestos.

We are now seeing an emerging trend of 'third wave' victims of asbestos-related disease: people who never worked with asbestos in an occupational setting but were exposed to it through activities such as home renovations.

## ***Asbestos that is in good condition presents a very low risk to someone's health***

### **FACT**

Scientific and medical evidence suggests that living in a building that contains asbestos is not dangerous, as long as the asbestos product is in good condition: that is, undamaged and undisturbed.

Asbestos cement sheeting (and other non-friable asbestos) does not pose an increased health risk as long as the products are in good condition, well maintained and are not disturbed or damaged.

However, if the products become damaged or they start to deteriorate, this increases the likelihood that asbestos fibres may become airborne and it is advisable to have them stabilised and removed.

Visually inspect the materials from time to time for deterioration and damage.

## ***Workplaces built before 2004 must have an asbestos register***

### **FACT**

In Tasmania, the Work Health and Safety Regulations require workplaces built before 2004 to prepare and maintain and update an asbestos register. This register identifies any asbestos containing materials located at the workplace. It must be made available to staff, contractors or other visitors.

### ***Please note***

This information is for guidance only and is not to be taken as an expression of the law. It should be read in conjunction with the Work Health and Safety Act 2012 and Regulations 2012 and any other relevant legislation. To view, go to the WorkSafe Tasmania website at [www.worksafe.tas.gov.au](http://www.worksafe.tas.gov.au).

We welcome your feedback on this guide. Send to: [wstinfo@justice.tas.gov.au](mailto:wstinfo@justice.tas.gov.au)

This information is based on material supplied by The Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency: [www.asbestossafety.gov.au](http://www.asbestossafety.gov.au).