



Northern  
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# ASBESTOS ALERT

Stop. Think Asbestos. Seek Advice.

## INFORMATION FOR SCHOOLS

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# Information for schools

“You can’t tell if cement sheeting contains asbestos just by looking at it!”

## **Buildings constructed before 31 December 2003 may contain asbestos.**

The most accurate way to find out if your school contains asbestos material is for experienced people to inspect and test it. You can’t tell by looking at it! Asbestos Registers were developed for all government schools. For assistance in identifying asbestos in your school, first check the register, and then call DECS Senior Project Officer, Repairs and Maintenance – School Buildings on **8901 4928**.

Asbestos cement has been used extensively as roofing and cladding materials in Australia, but only materials fitted before the mid to late 1980s are likely to contain asbestos. Other asbestos containing materials made before the 1980s may be found around your school. These include water drainage and flue pipes, roofing shingles, guttering, vinyl tiles and the underlay to vinyl sheet floors.

## **What are the risks?**

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 school contains materials made from asbestos.

Studies show that these materials, if left undisturbed in a reasonable condition, are not a significant health risk. If the asbestos fibres remain firmly bound in a solid matrix, generally you do not need to remove the asbestos containing material. Weathered asbestos roofing does not release airborne fibres unless the material is disturbed.

Health problems usually occur when people are unaware of the hazards of working with asbestos containing materials. The important point is to always work in a manner that ensures minimal release of dust or small particles from the asbestos containing material. Asbestos becomes a health risk when large volumes of asbestos fibres are released into the air and inhaled. If you follow safety guidelines, asbestos-containing materials should not be a problem.



## Guide for principals

### When is asbestos dangerous?

Asbestos fibres are not generally considered harmful unless they are inhaled, which is the most common way for asbestos to enter the body.

Asbestos is most dangerous when it is 'friable', which means it can be crumbled, pulverised or reduced to powder by hand pressure when dry. Non-friable asbestos is a material which the asbestos fibres are bonded by cement, vinyl, resin or other similar materials. Non-friable asbestos containing materials, such as asbestos cement sheet or vinyl asbestos floor coverings, present negligible asbestos hazard unless asbestos fibres are released into the air by pulverising, grinding or cutting the material.

The most important point is to always work so there is minimal release of dust or fibres from the asbestos containing material.

Wearing personal protective equipment (PPE) will significantly reduce the chance of exposure to asbestos fibres.

### Removing asbestos-containing material is a specialised task.

In any situation in which there is any friable asbestos (Class A) or more than the legally allowed ten square metres of non-friable asbestos (Class B) an asbestos removal licence must be held. Refer to Part 8.10 of the Work Health and Safety (National Uniform Legislation) Regulations for more information on the types of work involving asbestos removal that require a licensed asbestos removalist. Contractors do not need a licence to remove less than ten square metres of non-friable asbestos, but they must be familiar with the Work Health and Safety (National Uniform Legislation) Regulations pertaining to asbestos and the [NT Code of Practice – How to Safely Remove Asbestos](#).

Only a licensed asbestos removalist should remove the asbestos containing underlay to vinyl sheet floors.

For details of DECS procedures in relation to work being carried out on school premises visit the [DECS website](#) or call the DECS Senior Project Officer, Repairs and Maintenance – School Buildings on **8901 4928**.



## Guide for principals

“Before commencement and at intervals during work use the checklist”

### What you should know

- Government schools that contain or are suspected of containing asbestos are on the Asbestos Register. Principals are responsible for maintaining the register and assuring all contractors have access to the register.
- For all major works involving asbestos containing material a licensed asbestos removalist must be employed.
- Sight a copy of the scope of works before commencement and document work as completed
- Confirm that the contractor is aware of actions to be taken if asbestos is sighted or suspected during the work.
- View the NT WorkSafe [Notification of asbestos removal form](#) if the work includes identified work on asbestos and check that it has been signed and ratified by NT WorkSafe.
- For all minor works involving less than ten square metres of non-friable asbestos use the following checklist and ensure all the issues are addressed by the contractor or school maintenance officer.

### Check list

- Has the work area been effectively barricaded and isolated?
- Have warning signs been erected?
- Have air-conditioning units been switched off and vents sealed?
- Has dust generated from the work been contained within the immediate area?
- Are breathing protection devices being worn during asbestos removal?
- Are disposable coveralls being worn during asbestos removal?
- Are drop sheets being used to gather work-generated asbestos waste?
- Has removed asbestos material been bagged and sealed in 200-micron plastic?
- Are the asbestos disposal bins lined with plastic?
- Are the vacuum cleaners used to clean asbestos dust and material compliant with Australian Standard 3544 – ‘Industrial vacuum cleaners for particulates hazardous to health’?
- Has the Asbestos Register been updated?



## Guide for principals

### In the planning stage/prior to work commencing

- Check to see if the surface is asbestos.
- Look for asbestos stickers on the surface. **If you have any doubts, assume the surface is asbestos.**
- Check the Asbestos Register.**  
Note: Asbestos Registers are guides and should not be relied on. However, if the Register indicates that the material is asbestos then it should be treated as such.
- Look for the presence of fibrous material such as fibrous cement sheeting. If the surface is of concrete or brick it is unlikely that asbestos will be present.
- Call DECS Senior Project Officer, Repairs and Maintenance – School Buildings on **8901 4928**.

### Read the following safety checklist before you start working

- Do not use power tools**  
Asbestos fibres can be released if power tools are used for anything other than the removal of screws and bolts. Non-powered tools should be used instead as they generate less dust.
- Do not waterblast or scrub with a stiff broom**  
It is illegal to waterblast asbestos containing materials. If the material has been accidentally waterblasted or has suddenly deteriorated in some way, you will need to call a licensed asbestos removalist.
- To prepare a surface for painting** If you need to prepare a surface for painting, gently remove any loose paint with a scraper, keeping the surface wet to minimise the release of fibres. You can use sugar soap to clean the surface.  
  
Remember do not waterblast and be careful when working on asbestos sheet roofing as it can be brittle and slippery when wet. It is also very important that you treat any waste created during the preparation of the surface as if it is contaminated with asbestos.
- Avoid drilling**  
Do not drill holes through eaves, flues or vents. Never cut into asbestos cement sheet. If an occasional hole is required mask area with tape, use a non-powered drill and wear a mask. If significant work is required it is advisable to remove the entire sheet and replace it with a non-asbestos material.



## Guide for school maintenance officers and contractors

“Do not use power tools... avoid drilling”

- Minimise exposure to others**  
Close doors and windows to limit the spread of any dust. Ensure that people are kept out of the area. Where appropriate, relocate the building’s occupants during the work. Talk it over with those who may be affected by the asbestos removal and disposal, for example, your neighbours.
- Protective equipment**  
You should wear disposable coveralls and an appropriate mask if you are working with asbestos products. Make sure your mask has two straps to hold it firmly in place and is rated as P1 or P2 (your hardware store can supply these). Do not use masks that only have one strap.
- Don’t drop asbestos cement sheets**  
Remove asbestos sheets carefully. Make sure you lower them gently to the ground.  
Do not drop them.
- When to replace asbestos cement sheeting**  
As with all products, asbestos cement has a limited life. Roofing or other cladding that has weathered to the extent of becoming structurally unsound, or no longer waterproof, should be replaced. It is a legal requirement that a licensed asbestos removalist be employed to dismantle areas greater than ten square metres of asbestos cement materials.
- Clean up thoroughly**  
Asbestos cement residues in the removal area should be cleaned up by wet wiping.

## Things to keep an eye on

- Watch for environmental damage**  
Regularly inspect the condition of asbestos roofing and other sheeting to ensure it has not been damaged by environmental conditions. Badly weathered or damaged sheets may need to be replaced.
- Keep guttering (and downpipes) in good repair**  
Guttering and downpipes should be kept in good repair on buildings with asbestos roofing. Wet roof gutters before removing them and wrap them carefully.
- Is tank water safe?**  
Tank water collected from asbestos cement roofing may contain some asbestos. Drinking this water does not present a significant health risk. However, you might consider replacing the roof or fitting water filters to taps.

Before carrying out any work:  
**Stop. Think Asbestos. Seek Advice.**

For more information see:

- NT WorkSafe information bulletin [Asbestos](#)
- [NT Code of Practice – How to Safely Remove Asbestos](#) or
- phone DECS Senior Project Officer, Repairs and Maintenance – School Buildings on **8901 4928**.







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