

# Asbestos safety

If your property is damaged in a bushfire, flood or storm, you should be cautious about the risk of asbestos when sorting through debris or doing repairs or renovations.

Asbestos is a known carcinogen. Disturbing any amount of asbestos can release fibres into the air. These fibres could be inhaled or swallowed, leading to significant health issues.

The safe handling of asbestos material is critical. If you suspect your property could be contaminated, do not start clean-up until you have been told it is safe to do so.

## Where am I likely to find asbestos?

If a house, garage, shed or commercial building was built or renovated before the 1990s, it probably contains some form of asbestos.

Asbestos has been used in over 3,000 products, including those used in home areas commonly renovated or repaired:

- bathrooms and kitchens
- under vinyl floors, behind tiles and in carpet underlay
- carports, sheds and outbuildings
- guttering, downpipes and roof sheeting

You can't tell if a material contains asbestos just by looking at it. Only scientific testing of a sample can confirm this.

## Leave asbestos clean up to professionals

If you suspect damage at your property involves asbestos containing material, get the product tested, or assume it is asbestos.

Removal requirements for asbestos depend on whether it is friable or non-friable and the amount of asbestos containing material present. A licensed asbestos removalist should be engaged to identify asbestos, prepare samples for testing, and manage asbestos removal. Although a homeowner can remove less than 10m<sup>2</sup> of non-friable asbestos themselves, untrained people should not attempt to do this. It is strongly recommended that asbestos is removed by a licensed asbestos removalist as

asbestos removal is a health risk requiring planning, preparation and strict safety standards. All friable asbestos must be removed by a Class A licensed asbestos removalist.

It is illegal to dispose of asbestos waste in your kerbside bin. Asbestos must be disposed of at a licensed landfill that accepts asbestos waste. It is strongly recommended that a licensed asbestos removalist is engaged to dispose of any asbestos waste.

To find a licensed asbestos removalist, go to [www.worksafe.tas.gov.au](http://www.worksafe.tas.gov.au) and search for 'asbestos removalist'.

## Use protective clothing

If you are visiting your property and sorting through debris, wear protective clothing and footwear to minimise your exposure to asbestos, airborne dust and other hazards.

### Safety equipment should include:

- disposable P1 or P2 face masks. Make sure you get a good seal around the face and mouth; take care if you have a beard or facial hair that might prevent this. Face masks can make normal breathing difficult so talk to your doctor if you have a heart or lung condition first.
- disposable coveralls with fitted hood and cuffs
- boots without laces
- boot covers
- protective gloves.

You can purchase these items from a hardware store, but be aware they may be in short supply during a crisis.

### To use protective clothing and equipment safely:

- put your protective gear on before entering your property
- remove it before you leave
- place it in a garbage bag and seal it after use; dispose of it as asbestos waste
- clean your shoes before wearing them again
- wash your hands thoroughly with soap.

You should minimise your disturbance of dust and ash. If possible, dust should be gently wetted down before you begin using a fine spray, not high-pressure hosing.

If you're unsure whether your property contains asbestos and you don't have the appropriate personal protective equipment, avoid areas where there is ash or dust that may contain asbestos fibres.

## Help with asbestos-related issues

Further information on asbestos is available from:

### WorkSafe Tasmania

1300 366 322

[www.worksafe.tas.gov.au/asbestos](http://www.worksafe.tas.gov.au/asbestos)