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Workplace Health and Safety Queensland

Department of Justice and Attorney General

Safe working practices when maintaining asbestos

[Safe work practices](#)

[Preparation for maintenance or service work](#)

[Safe maintenance and service work techniques](#)

[Prohibited activities with asbestos](#)

[Safety tips for asbestos-containing material \(ACM\)](#)

[maintenance or removal work](#)

Safe work practices

Safe work practices or methods prevent hazardous asbestos fibres becoming airborne and reduce the risk of them being inhaled.

All work on asbestos-containing materials (ACM)

must be carried out in accordance with the practices and procedures set out in the:

- [National Code of Practice for the Management and Control of Asbestos in Workplaces \[NOHSC:2018 \(2005\)\]](#) (non-Queensland Government link) (asbestos management code)
- [National Code of Practice for the Safe Removal of Asbestos 2nd Edition \[NOHSC:2002 \(2005\)\]](#) (non-Queensland Government link) (asbestos removal code).

The appendices of the asbestos management code contain specific instructions for how to safely work with ACM which **must be followed** for:

- drilling of asbestos-containing materials
- sealing, painting, coating and cleaning of asbestos cement products
- cleaning leaf litter from the gutters of asbestos cement roofs
- replacing cabling in asbestos cement conduits or boxes
- working on electrical mounting boards (switchboards) containing asbestos

Downloads

- [Handling asbestos safely after a storm](#) (PDF, 281 kB)
- [Identifying and recording asbestos in the workplace](#) (PDF, 271 kB)
- [Air monitoring when removing asbestos](#) (PDF, 270 kB)
- [Clearance inspections for asbestos work areas](#) (PDF, 266 kB)
- [Asbestos flooring](#) (PDF, 344 KB)
- [Low density asbestos fibre board](#) (PDF, 318 kB)

- inspecting asbestos friction materials.

Preparation for maintenance or service work

It is essential to have the correct tools, personal protective equipment, decontamination materials, barricades and warning signs prior to work commencing, and to minimise the number of people in the work area.

Establishing barriers

- The asbestos work area should be clearly defined to ensure that non-essential people do not enter, and to warn people that asbestos work is being carried out.
- Potential entry points to the asbestos work area should be signposted or labelled in accordance with [*AS 1319 Safety signs for the occupational environment*](#) (non-Queensland Government link). These labels should be weatherproof, constructed of lightweight material and be adequately secured.

More information on establishing barriers can be found in section 11.4.1 of the [asbestos management code](#) (non-Queensland Government link).

Preparing the work area

- Before commencing work, plastic sheeting may need to be placed on the floor and any other surfaces that may become contaminated with asbestos dust. At a minimum, heavy duty 200 µm thick plastic sheeting must be used.
- Wet wiping or vacuuming of the surface that is to be worked on may also be necessary before commencing work. This is to minimise the disturbance of asbestos fibres on the surface.

More information on preparing the work area can be found in section 11.4.2 of the [asbestos management code](#) (non-Queensland Government link).

Safe maintenance and service

work techniques

Wherever possible, **dry asbestos-containing materials (ACM) should not be worked on.**

Techniques to prevent or minimise the generation of airborne asbestos fibres include:

- wetting ACM using surfactants or wetting agents such as detergent water
- using thickened substances, pastes and gels, such as hair gel or shaving cream, to cover the surfaces of ACM that are to be worked on (these substances should be compatible with the conditions of use, including temperature, and not pose a health risk)
- using shadow vacuuming
- performing the task in a controlled environment e.g. a ventilated enclosure.

Ensure that the work has been assessed for any electrical hazards that may result from the use of water or other liquids. If an electrical hazard exists, primary consideration must be given to removing the ACM, rather than relying on dry work methods.

More information on safe maintenance and service work techniques can be found in section 11.5 of the [asbestos management code](#) (non-Queensland Government link).

Tools

- High-speed abrasive power and pneumatic tools such as angle grinders, sanders and saws and high-speed drills **must never be used.**
- Manually-operated hand tools must be used wherever possible.
- If manually-operated hand tools cannot provide sufficient physical force to perform the work, low-speed battery-powered tools, which are able to be used in conjunction with wet methods for dust control, must be used.
- Battery-powered tools must be fitted with a local exhaust ventilation hood whenever possible.
- At the end of the work all tools

must be:

- fully decontaminated
- placed in sealed containers, or
- disposed of as asbestos waste.

More information on tools can be found in section 11.6 of the [asbestos management code](#) (non-Queensland Government link).

Personal protective equipment (PPE)

The risk assessment should determine the need for and the appropriate types and levels of PPE, including respiratory equipment.

All respiratory protection equipment must meet the requirements of [AS/NZS 1716 Respiratory Protective Devices](#) (non-Queensland Government link).

More information on PPE is available from:

- [personal protective equipment](#)
- section 11.7 of the [asbestos management code](#) (non-Queensland Government link)
- section 9.7 and Appendix C of the [asbestos removal code](#) (non-Queensland Government link).

Asbestos vacuum cleaners

Asbestos vacuum cleaners must comply with [AS 3544-1988 Industrial Vacuum Cleaners for particulates hazardous to health](#) and [AS 4260-1997 High Efficiency Particulate Air Filters \(HEPA\) - Classification, Construction and Performance](#).

- Household vacuum cleaners **must never be used** where asbestos is or may be present - even if it has a HEPA filter.
- PPE should be worn whenever an asbestos vacuum cleaner is opened to change the bag or filter, or to perform other maintenance.
- Asbestos vacuum cleaners should only be emptied by a competent person:
 - with the correct PPE
 - in a controlled environment
 - in compliance

with the
manufacturer's
instructions.

- Wherever possible, asbestos vacuum cleaners should not be hired as they can be difficult to fully decontaminate.
- Hiring may be more viable in some cases, e.g. when a one-off maintenance task is required.
- Asbestos vacuum cleaners should only be hired from organisations that provide vacuum cleaners specifically for work with asbestos.

More information on vacuum cleaners is available in section 11.8 of the [asbestos management code](#) (non-Queensland Government link).

Decontamination

The type of decontamination required depends on the type of asbestos (friable or bonded), the work method used and the site conditions.

There are two procedures for **workplace decontamination**:

- wet decontamination - using wet rags to wipe down contaminated areas
- dry decontamination - involves carefully rolling or folding up and sealing plastic sheeting and/or vacuuming the asbestos work area with an asbestos vacuum cleaner. This method should only be used where wet methods are not suitable or pose a risk because of electricity or slippage.

If extensive contamination has occurred, an asbestos removalist must be engaged to perform the decontamination. Clearance monitoring may be required.

All **tools, equipment and reusable respirators** used during the work must be dismantled (where appropriate) and decontaminated. This must be done using either wet or dry decontamination methods.

Personal decontamination must be undertaken every time a worker leaves the asbestos work area and again when the asbestos task is completed.

More information on decontamination procedures can be found in section 11.9.2 of the [asbestos](#)

[management code](#) (non-Queensland Government link).

Clearance inspections

A clearance inspection verifies that the asbestos work area is safe to be returned to normal use after work involving the disturbance of asbestos-containing material (ACM) has occurred. For more information about clearance inspections, refer to:

- Section 11.10 of the [asbestos management code](#) (non-Queensland Government link)
- [Fact sheet - Clearance inspections for asbestos work areas](#) (PDF, 73 kB).

Waste removal and disposal

Asbestos waste must always be removed and disposed of by a competent person. This includes contaminated PPE and cleaning materials used in the work.

Asbestos waste can be collected and disposed of in:

- asbestos waste bags
- solid, sealable asbestos waste containers such as bins or drums, if storage is required.

Controlled wetting of asbestos waste must be used to reduce the possibility of dust emissions during the bagging or containment of the waste.

More information on waste disposal methods can be found in section 11.11 of the [asbestos management code](#) (non-Queensland Government link).

Prohibited activities with asbestos

The *Workplace Health and Safety Regulation 2008* and sections 11.6 and 11.8 of the asbestos management code prohibit the use of certain tools and work methods when working with asbestos-containing materials (ACM) as they can generate dangerous airborne asbestos fibres.

These prohibitions include the use of:

- high-speed abrasive power and pneumatic tools
- high-pressure water cleaners
- compressed air or abrasive blasting
- household vacuum cleaners even if they have a HEPA filter. Only vacuum cleaners specifically

designed for safe work with asbestos may be used.

Full details of prohibited activities with asbestos can be found in Part 13 of the *Workplace Health and Safety Regulation 2008* and sections 11.6 and 11.8 of the [asbestos management code](#) (non-Queensland Government link).

Safety tips for asbestos-containing material (ACM) maintenance or removal work

Below are some of the safety tips you should follow where you believe asbestos-containing material (ACM) is present:

- STOP work immediately and have a sample tested.
- The asbestos work area must be clearly marked so that non-essential people do not enter the area. Entry points to the asbestos work area must be signposted or labelled.
- Do not use high-speed power tools such as angle grinders, sanders, saws and drills. Manual tools or low-speed battery powered tools, used in conjunction with wet methods (saturating the asbestos product using a manually controlled low pressure course spray) must be used instead as they generate less hazardous dust.
- Wet methods can only be used when there are no electrical hazards present so it is safest to turn off the electricity when you are working to prevent electrocution.
- Do not water blast or scrub asbestos cement sheeting with a stiff broom. If the material has been water blasted, or has suddenly deteriorated in some way, you will need to call a licensed asbestos removalist immediately.
- 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.
- Never prepare surfaces using dry

sanding methods.

- Avoid drilling. Never cut into asbestos cement sheeting. If a hole is required, mask the area with tape, use a non-powered drill and wear a disposable Class P1 respirator (not a dust mask). If significant work is required, it is advisable to remove the entire sheet and replace it with a non-asbestos material.
- Minimise exposure to others. Close doors and windows to limit the spread of any dust and ensure that people are kept out of the area.
- Consult with those who may be affected by the asbestos removal and disposal, for example, neighbouring properties.
- Don't drop asbestos cement sheets. Make sure you lower them gently to the ground. When stacking sheets, do not skid one sheet over another, as this can cause release of fibres.
- Remove all asbestos waste as soon as you can. Do not leave sheets lying about where they may be further broken or crushed by people or traffic.
- Put used disposable coveralls and masks in bags for removal with other asbestos waste.
- All asbestos waste must be double bagged or double wrapped. Wet all asbestos waste and collect in heavy duty polythene bags, wrap in heavy duty 200 µm thick plastic or put it in double-lined bins. It is illegal to place asbestos waste in domestic garbage bins and compactors.
- Each bag must be correctly labelled: CAUTION - ASBESTOS AVOID CREATING DUST. SERIOUS INHALATION HEALTH HAZARD.
- All ACM must be disposed in accordance with your local council's requirements.

Asbestos waste is treated differently to normal household and industrial rubbish, and is usually buried at a special location. Before taking asbestos waste to a disposal site, make arrangements with your local authority about what is required.

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