

Practice Note # 3



This document is intended to provide guidance to workers and the self-employed and is meant to supplement or support the PCBU's own policies.

REMEMBER:

- **Asbestos fibre exposure can cause fatal lung cancer and diseases**
- **You must also be trained to work safely with asbestos**

Essential Information:

Also refer to the following NZDAA guidance sheets:

- **#1 Personal protective equipment**
- **#2 Selection of personal decontamination**
- **#4 Disposal of Asbestos Waste**

What to do if you discover or accidentally disturb asbestos during your work

What this sheet covers

This sheet describes what you need to know and do if you discover or accidentally disturb and release asbestos during your work.

All structures built before 1st January 2000 are likely to contain some form of asbestos constructed material, and in the case of a workplace (not a home), are required to have an asbestos management plan, which will advise contractors and workers what type of asbestos material is present, its location, and condition.

Furthermore, areas where asbestos containing materials are located should be clearly marked out on plans, and on the material with visible asbestos warning stickers.

Similarly, should the structure be subject to renovation or demolition, a comprehensive and intrusive pre-refurbishment, or demolition survey must be completed.

Depending on circumstances, either survey should be readily available for workers and contractors so they can complete their works safely and without risk.

However, it is acknowledged that even with preparation and planning, circumstances may arise where potential asbestos material is inadvertently discovered or disturbed during renovations or demolition works. In these circumstances, the following guidance is provided.

Homes and residential properties

In New Zealand, homes, and their non-commercial owners are excluded from requirements to have asbestos surveys and management plans done.

However, it is good practice, that if your home is older than 2000, and you are planning refurbishment or maintenance on your home, or you are a tradesman, that you check to see if there is any asbestos containing materials within the area. A quick check can be done [here](#).

Unexpected discovery of asbestos

- All material, if suspected to be containing asbestos, must be treated as asbestos until proven otherwise.
- If, during your work, you discover materials which you suspect to be asbestos, you must **stop work** immediately.
- Put up warning signage, warning tape or any other method to prevent people from entering the affected area and immediately notify whoever is in charge (which may be the homeowner)
- The person in charge should arrange to have a sample of the material taken by a licensed asbestos assessor. A licensed assessor can be found [here](#).
- If the material does not contain asbestos, work can continue
- If the material does contain asbestos, the licensed assessor can provide advice on how best to proceed
- Don't forget to update the asbestos management plan or survey, or if it is a home, notify the owner or occupier of the home



Accidental release of asbestos

- If you accidentally disturb and release known asbestos containing material during your work, it must be dealt with quickly and appropriately
- **Stop** further damage immediately to reduce the damage, and cost of cleanup.
- Remove yourself and others out of the affected area
- Contact whoever is in charge immediately
- You, or your clothing may have asbestos fibres on them – DO NOT go wandering around the worksite, or to your car, or shared lunchroom. Stay where you are – you will be required to change into another set of clothes and your items will need to be placed and sealed in a bag until further advice from a licensed assessor can be sought.
- The affected area must be sealed or covered, and warning signage installed
- The person in charge should arrange to have a sample of the material taken by a licensed asbestos assessor. A licensed assessor can also provide advice on how best to proceed. A licensed assessor can be found [here](#).



Emergency Procedures

- It is recommended that any contractor or PCBU that either has asbestos containing materials in their workplace or does work that can impact asbestos containing materials have their own emergency procedures to address the discovery and accidental damage of asbestos.
- Workers must be trained in workplace emergency procedures

Updating of workplace asbestos plans or surveys

In any instance where asbestos material is identified that is not included in any workplace plans or surveys, these plans or surveys must be updated to include that material and the method of management, or removal.

