



Asbestos

What is the issue?

Dairies and other farm buildings may contain building materials containing asbestos, posing a serious health risk to humans.

Why is it an issue?

Asbestos is dangerous to human health. Its use is now banned in new building or insulation materials.

What are the consequences of ignoring it?

The inhalation of asbestos fibres is known to cause diseases such as asbestosis, lung cancer and mesothelioma. While these conditions are usually related to long-term exposure, the **level** of exposure that may cause health effects is not known and all exposure to asbestos fibres and dust must be controlled.

The use of all forms of asbestos and products containing asbestos was prohibited from December 31, 2003.

This ban on use does not apply to any fixed or installed asbestos-containing materials/products that were in use at the time of the prohibition.

How safe is your dairy now?

Many dairies and other farm buildings built before the early 1980s are likely to include some form of fibro cement, asbestos cement sheeting, brick cladding, corrugated cement sheeting, and insulation or hot water pipe lagging that might contain asbestos.

Building materials that contain asbestos are usually of *minimal* risk to people as long as they remain undamaged. However, it poses a greater health threat if the building materials break, deteriorate or are disturbed by activities such as drilling and cutting that produce dust containing asbestos fibres. It is then that miniscule particles of asbestos fibre are released into the air, to be readily inhaled and settle on the lungs.

Generally, internal asbestos sheeting on walls or ceilings does not pose a risk if it is in good condition and coated with paint.

External asbestos wall cladding or cement roofs do not need to be replaced unless they are broken or the surfaces have deteriorated.



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What can be done right now?

It is extremely important to identify asbestos and perform a risk assessment. This information needs to be readily available to anyone working in the dairy or who may undertake contract work, such as the installers of equipment such as milk vats, plumbers, electricians or builders altering, renovating or demolishing a building.

It can be difficult to identify asbestos with the naked eye, so it's best to have an assessment done by a qualified professional. Sample testing for asbestos can be arranged with the National Association of Testing Authorities (NATA) by phoning (03) 9329 1633.

Once identified, the presence and location of asbestos must be noted in the building, usually by labels and signs.

The condition of the material containing asbestos must be assessed and an asbestos removalist engaged if it needs to be removed.

What are the next steps?

If you need to remove asbestos on your property, engage a WorkCover-licensed removalist.

If you have to handle asbestos waste on your property, you should:

- wear a suitable mask to avoid breathing in any fibres;
- wet the asbestos articles and keep them damp, to stop loose particles from escaping;
- minimise any cutting and breaking of the articles to be packed;
- keep packages in easy-to-handle sizes;
- double wrap asbestos in polythene sheeting (approximately 0.2mm thick);
- use adhesive tape to completely cover any openings in the package; and
- label packages to indicate the presence of asbestos.

Asbestos can only be disposed of by licensed removalists, at a site licensed to accept it.

What you should be considering longer term

Building material containing asbestos will become brittle with age, so the ultimate solution is to replace any affected buildings and/or materials with products that do not contain asbestos.

What actions are not optional?

Asbestos regulations require employers to:

- identify whether asbestos is present in the workplace (e.g. building, structure or plant);
- assess the risk of employees' exposure to asbestos; and



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- control any risk of exposure.

You must provide a copy of the most recent risk assessment to any employee or self-employed person who comes into your workplace, such as builders, plumbers and electricians.

The manufacture, supply, storage, transport, sale, installation, replacement or reuse of asbestos and products containing asbestos is prohibited.

If your risk assessment requires the asbestos be removed, use a licensed removalist.

Where to go for more information

<p>National OHS Commission</p> <p>Code of Practice for the Safe Removal of Asbestos</p> <p>Guide to the Control of Asbestos Hazards in Buildings and Structures</p> <p>Note: These publications are under review; final versions should be released in the first part of 2005.</p>	<p>www.nohsc.gov.au</p> <p>www.nohsc.gov.au</p>
<p>WorkSafe Victoria</p> <p>List of asbestos removalists</p> <p>List of approved analysts</p> <p>General information on asbestos</p> <p>Changes to asbestos laws</p>	<p>www.worksafe.vic.gov.au</p> <p>www.worksafe.vic.gov.au</p> <p>www.worksafe.vic.gov.au</p> <p>www.workcover.vic.gov.au</p>