

Asbestos

Fact sheet | October 2022

What is asbestos?

The term asbestos refers to a group of naturally occurring minerals found in rock.

White, blue and brown asbestos were all mined in Australia until 1983.

Asbestos was used widely in industrial and commercial applications from the late 1800s. Uses included asbestos cement (AC) building materials, roofing tiles, fire blankets, and brake linings and pads for motor vehicles.

Asbestos cement was commonly used in the construction of residential buildings from the 1940s – houses built before 1990 are likely to have some asbestos cement products.

Asbestos Victoria has an asbestos identification tool available at <https://www.asbestos.vic.gov.au/about-asbestos/finding-and-identifying/find-and-identify-asbestos-tool>

What are the health risks of asbestos?

Asbestos only poses a risk to health when asbestos fibres are inhaled as dust.

Asbestos cement materials that are in good condition don't pose a health risk, because the asbestos fibres are bound together.

If the material is damaged or crumbling, or has been disturbed by cutting, drilling or sawing, fibres may be released into the air and pose a health risk.

Inhalation is the main way asbestos fibres can enter the body. When the fibres are inhaled, they can remain deep in the lungs, causing scarring and inflammation. Asbestos exposure can increase the risk of some forms of cancer in humans.

We are all exposed to low levels of asbestos in the air we breathe every day. However, most people do not become ill from this exposure, because the levels of asbestos present in the environment are very low. Whether a person goes on to develop an asbestos-related disease depends on a range of factors; for example, the level and duration of exposure, length of time since first exposure, the fibre type, and concurrent exposure to tobacco smoke and other carcinogens.

More information about the health risks of asbestos is available at [asbestos.vic.gov.au](https://www.asbestos.vic.gov.au)

How to deal with asbestos following flooding

Floods can cause harmful materials such as asbestos to shift or become exposed. Be cautious when assessing and working with flood-impacted property.

Asbestos can be found in some fibre cement sheeting and pipes, vinyl floor tiles, electrical parts and roof materials. It is not always possible to tell whether a material contains asbestos by looking at it.

[epa.vic.gov.au](https://www.epa.vic.gov.au)

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1300 372 842



If in any doubt:

- Do not disturb the material
- Take reasonable steps to prevent others from disturbing the material.

EPA is providing technical advice to support clean-up operations.

If you require assistance in cleaning up your flood-affected property, contact Emergency Recovery Victoria on 1800 560 760.

What is the safest way to clear asbestos-containing material from a property?

We recommend you use a licensed asbestos removalist to perform the clean-up work. They know how to remove and dispose of asbestos safely, and without risk to you and your neighbours.

If you are using a contractor to remove asbestos, they must be licensed by WorkSafe Victoria. Their website (worksafe.vic.gov.au/asbestos) has a list of licensed asbestos removalists or you can search online.

If you need assistance with clean-up after a flood, contact Emergency Recovery Victoria on 1800 560 760.

If you're considering doing the clean-up yourself, you should follow guidelines available for homeowners on asbestos.vic.gov.au. It's important that you take precautions to avoid risk to your health, and that of your family and neighbours. If potentially or suspected asbestos materials must be moved and are not already wet, they should be wetted down to prevent dust. Personal protective equipment (dust mask, gloves and coveralls) should be worn. More information is available from asbestos.vic.gov.au.

EPA can provide information about the disposal of asbestos as a waste product.

Visit epa.vic.gov.au or call us on 1300 372 842 for more information on where you can take your asbestos waste for disposal. Contact the facility before visiting to make sure it is operating.

If you're visiting a property but not cleaning up, personal protective equipment should be worn to minimise exposure to possible airborne dust and other hazards from flood-damaged homes.

Waste levy and gate fee waiver

- There will be no waste levy or gate fees at landfills accepting flood-affected waste from 46 flood-affected local government areas. This will apply until 31 December 2022.
- Flood-affected waste means any material:
- Deposited on a property by the floods, or
- Damaged by the floods
- The list of 46 flood-affected local government areas (LGAs) is available at: premier.vic.gov.au/fees-waived-flood-waste.

Further information and updates

Information on managing asbestos in the home is at betterhealth.vic.gov.au or worksafe.vic.gov.au

For current emergency advice, see Emergency Management Victoria's website emergency.vic.gov.au.

For more information or to report pollution, contact EPA on 1300 372 842 or visit epa.vic.gov.au.



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Authorised and published by the Victorian Government, 1 Treasury Place, Melbourne