

Is it safe? Cracked, damaged or weathered asbestos cement sheeting

Asbestos cement sheeting is a building material used in many Queensland houses. If a house was built before 1990, it is likely to have some asbestos cement sheeting in it.

Asbestos cement sheeting is not 100% asbestos. It is a cement sheet reinforced with typically 10-15% asbestos.

The size of asbestos fibres affects their risk to human health. Fibres that can reach the smallest airways of the lungs (respirable fibres) pose the greatest risk. Larger fibres are removed by the body in various ways.

If left undisturbed, asbestos cement sheeting is considered to pose a negligible risk to your health because the asbestos fibres are bound in the cement.

Cracked or Damaged Sheeting



Image sourced from www.nps.gov/history/hps/tps/recentpast/asbestosarticle.htm

At the time asbestos cement sheeting is cracked or damaged, some respirable asbestos fibres can be released into the air.

However, the number of released fibres is likely to be very low. This is because the material is not 100% asbestos, asbestos fibres in the sheeting are predominantly large and the asbestos is bound into the cement.

If you are close to the material when it cracks or is damaged, it poses a very low health risk. The health risk reduces if you are further away.

After it is damaged, asbestos cement sheeting does not continue to release significant quantities of asbestos fibres into the air. This is because the asbestos continues to be bound in the cement. To protect exposed edges from ongoing damage, they can be painted or sealed.



Image sourced from www.builderbill-diy-help.com

Weathered Roofs

Over time, asbestos cement roofs will deteriorate. The cement slowly breaks down and asbestos fibres are washed and blown away.

Even if an asbestos cement roof is in poor condition, it is not likely to pose an increased risk to your health. Any released fibres rapidly disperse into the air and their concentration (the number of fibres in an amount of air) reduces within a short distance from the roof.

Air testing near the ground has shown the concentration of fibres is very low¹ – the same as if the asbestos cement roof was not there.

Asbestos cement roofs can be left in place until they are no longer water tight. However, they can pose an increased risk to your health when they are disturbed or being worked on or when the roof gutters are being cleaned. Public health laws must be complied with and safety precautions need to be taken at such times.

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For information on how homeowners can safely work with or remove asbestos cement sheeting, please visit www.health.qld.gov.au/asbestos .

1 The Western Australian Advisory Committee on Hazardous Substances. 1990. *Asbestos cement products*. Western Australian Government: Perth.