

Workplace Health and Safety Queensland

Asbestos flooring

This fact sheet provides information regarding asbestos backed vinyl sheet flooring and vinyl tiles containing asbestos.

What is asbestos backed vinyl sheet flooring?

Asbestos backed vinyl sheet flooring is where the 'backing' (the side attached to the floor— see Figure 1) contains friable (easily broken) asbestos material.



Figure 1 – Asbestos backed vinyl sheet flooring

The vinyl sheeting itself does not contain asbestos, however, manufacturers sometimes incorporated a felt-like 'backing' for cushioning purposes. It is this backing which contains asbestos (typically 80–100 per cent).

Usually applied in sheet form, a lot of asbestos backed vinyl sheet flooring had a 'terrazzo' type (colourful marble or stone chip – see Figure 2) pattern on the surface. It is most commonly found in buildings constructed before the mid-1980s.



Figure 2 – Terazzo type asbestos backed vinyl sheet flooring.

What is the risk of exposure from asbestos backed vinyl sheet flooring?

As the asbestos backing is sealed from the atmosphere by the overlaying vinyl, the risk of exposure to airborne fibres from asbestos backed vinyl sheet flooring is low unless the vinyl material is damaged or disturbed.

Minor defects such as cracks, peeling or small worn patches in the surface vinyl will generally not cause asbestos to become airborne. However, asbestos backed vinyl sheet flooring with defects must not be subject to mechanical abrasion as these kind of activities may cause further deterioration.

In cases where vinyl sheet flooring has been damaged to the extent where the asbestos containing material on the underside is disturbed, a hazard assessment must be undertaken by a competent person to assess what control measures must be implemented to control any risk.

Where asbestos backed vinyl sheet flooring is to be removed, it must only be removed by an A Class asbestos removal licence holder in accordance with the *Workplace Health and Safety Regulation 2011*. Additional guidance can be found in the *How to Safely Remove Asbestos Code of Practice 2011*.

What are asbestos containing vinyl tiles?

Asbestos vinyl tiles contain 8–30 per cent asbestos in a tightly bonded matrix (see Figure 3). They do

not have a 'backing' and are usually glued directly to the floor. It should be noted that glue used to adhere the asbestos vinyl tiles to the floor may also contain asbestos.



Figure 3 – Asbestos vinyl tiles © WorkSafe Victoria

What is the risk of exposure from asbestos containing vinyl tiles?

Exposure to asbestos from asbestos containing vinyl tiles that are in good condition is thought to be very low.

Floor care treatment systems that include the use of a sealant over which the finish coats are applied should be used on asbestos containing vinyl tiles. Two or more layers of sealant should be applied as a base coat followed by one or more layers of a high percentage solids finish.

Spray buffing or dry burnishing should only be performed on floors that have sufficient finish so that the pad cannot contact the underlying asbestos vinyl tile.

The following are prohibited when cleaning asbestos containing materials:

- using power tools with an abrasive mechanism
- using high pressure spray equipment (e.g. water blasting).

Where more than 10m² of asbestos containing vinyl tiles are to be removed, and the asbestos remains in a bonded state, it must only be removed by an B or A class asbestos removal licence holder in accordance with the *Work Health and Safety Regulation 2011*. Additional guidance can be found in the *How to Safely Remove Asbestos Code of Practice 2011*.

Signage and labelling

A person with management or control of a workplace must ensure the presence and location of asbestos or ACM identified at the workplace is clearly indicated. If reasonably practicable, the asbestos or ACM must be indicated by a label. A competent person should determine the number and position of labels required. If it is not practicable to label the asbestos containing material and a risk assessment suggests asbestos containing material might be disturbed or people might be exposed, a prominent warning sign must be displayed in the immediate vicinity.

The asbestos containing material register

Asbestos backed vinyl sheet flooring and asbestos containing vinyl tiles, or any vinyl sheet flooring or tiles which are presumed to contain asbestos, must be entered into the asbestos register for the workplace.

For more information

Visit www.worksafe.qld.gov.au or call the Infoline on 1300 369 915.

Visit the website to download:

- *Work Health and Safety Regulation 2011*
- *How to Safely Remove Asbestos Code of Practice 2011*
- *How to Manage and Control Asbestos in the Workplace Code of Practice 2011*
- *Asbestos transitional arrangements* fact sheet
- *Clearance inspections following licensed asbestos removal work* fact sheet
- *Identifying and recording asbestos and asbestos containing materials in the workplace* fact sheet
- *Asbestos – low density asbestos fibre board* fact sheet
- *Air monitoring when removing asbestos* fact sheet
- *How to handle asbestos safely after a storm* fact sheet
- *Play it safe with asbestos: tips for property managers* fact sheet

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