

Workplace Health and Safety Queensland

Identifying and recording asbestos in the workplace

Purpose

This fact sheet describes the requirements for identifying asbestos containing materials and maintaining a register as set out in the national *Code of Practice for the Management and Control of Asbestos in Workplaces* (the code).

Identifying asbestos

It is the legal responsibility for the owner of a workplace built under an approval given by a local government before 1 January 1990 to ensure that, as far as practicable, all asbestos containing materials in the workplace are identified, assessed and documented in a register for asbestos containing material.

In Australia, the use of asbestos rapidly declined by the end of the 1980s. However, as the national ban on the importation and use of chrysotile asbestos did not commence until 31 December 2003, it is possible that asbestos was still used in applications such as gasket and friction products in plant (machinery and equipment) up to that date and remain in the workplace today. Therefore, the owners of other workplace structures that are not buildings (e.g. fixed plant), must, as far as practicable, identify asbestos containing material that is fixed or installed in the structure.

Where it is not practicable to confirm the presence of asbestos, the owner can presume material contains asbestos and must record it as such in the register.

The identification and assessment of asbestos containing material must be performed by a competent person who:

- has appropriate training, knowledge, experience and skill in identifying and assessing asbestos materials
- is familiar with building and construction
- practices to determine where asbestos is likely to be present

- is able to determine whether material is friable (easily broken) or bonded and assess its condition.

This person may be a building surveyor, an occupational hygienist, or a person who has previously worked in the asbestos removal industry and has experience removing different types of asbestos.

If there isn't a competent person within the organisation, the owner will need to engage an external competent person such as a consultant. They will need to consider the external person's:

- background
- experience
- specific expertise
- any qualifications or professional affiliations
- verified referees (also ask for examples of reports prepared for other clients).

The code also prescribes the personal protective equipment to be worn when conducting an inspection of asbestos containing material.

Asbestos containing material register

The owner of the structure must keep an accurate register of all asbestos containing materials on the premises. The asbestos register must record:

- the date/s on which the identification or inspection was made
- the details of the competent person(s) who carried out the identification/inspection
- the location of the asbestos
- whether it is friable or bonded
- its condition (i.e. damaged or intact)
- asbestos type (i.e. blue, brown or white)
- details on any material presumed to contain asbestos
- any inaccessible areas that are considered likely to contain asbestos.

The register must also contain hazard assessment information, recommended control measures and details of maintenance or service work on asbestos containing material.

The hazard assessment record must state:

- whether the asbestos containing material is friable or bonded and its condition (i.e. damaged or intact)
- whether the asbestos containing material is likely to be damaged or could deteriorate
- the likelihood of exposure
- if work carried out at the workplace is likely to disturb the material.

The register and hazard assessments must be reviewed every 12 months or earlier if the asbestos containing material has been disturbed, removed or if a hazard assessment indicates the need for reassessment.

Workers at the workplace must be informed about the asbestos register. The register must be readily available to all occupants and workers at the workplace and any person removing or conducting maintenance work that may disturb the asbestos containing material.

An asbestos management plan must also be developed in relation to the identified asbestos containing material. Components of the asbestos management plan include mechanisms for providing all relevant people with information about the contents of the asbestos register, decisions about management options, a timetable for action and procedures for reviewing and updating the management plan and asbestos register.

Analysing asbestos samples

Asbestos samples must be analysed by an approved National Association of Testing Authorities (NATA) analyst. The NATA website www.nata.asn.au lists accredited laboratories to perform asbestos analysis.

Warning signs and labels

Warning signs must be used to alert people to the presence of asbestos containing material at the workplace. As a minimum, one clearly visible sign warning of the presence of asbestos containing material must be installed at a main entrance.

These signs should state that the register be consulted prior to the commencement of any work.

A competent person must determine the number and position of labels required.

Labelling friable asbestos

Consideration should be given to the risk associated with the asbestos containing material and the likelihood of people being exposed to airborne fibres if it is disturbed. If it is not practical to label friable asbestos, such as lagging, a prominent warning sign must be posted in its immediate vicinity.

Friable asbestos containing material that has been covered by a sealant or is otherwise sealed from exposure to the atmosphere should be labelled so as to alert people to its existence.

Labelling bonded asbestos

Labelling is not required for every individual piece of bonded asbestos containing material if other control measures are in place and followed properly. However, owners of structures with bonded asbestos containing material must ensure that people who carry out work on the bonded material (e.g. painters, plumbers and other trades persons) are made aware of its presence.

For more information

Visit www.worksafe.qld.gov.au or call the Workplace Health and Safety Infoline on 1300 369 915.

Visit the website to download:

- Facts sheets:
 - *Air monitoring when removing asbestos*
 - *Clearance inspections for asbestos work areas*
 - *Asbestos flooring*
- *Code of Practice for the Management and Control of Asbestos in Workplaces*
- *Code of Practice for the Safe Removal of Asbestos* 2nd edition
- *Workplace Health and Safety Act 1995*
- *Workplace Health and Safety Regulation 2008.*

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