

Was your home built before 1990?

If so, it probably contains asbestos. This is something you need to consider if you're thinking of renovating or doing home maintenance.

What is asbestos?

Asbestos is a group of naturally-occurring fibrous minerals found in Australia and around the world.

How common is asbestos?

Asbestos is commonly found in many homes built before 1990. Asbestos minerals have an almost unique combination of chemical and physical properties, which at one time made them very popular in the building industry.

Until the mid-1980s, Australia had one of the highest rates of asbestos use per person in the world. It was used in over 3000 products.

Asbestos-containing materials were popular because they were cheap to produce, lightweight, versatile and fire-resistant. Because of this, asbestos may be found in many buildings and everyday consumer items.

We now know that asbestos can be dangerous and may put your health at risk if you are working with it.

Asbestos was gradually phased out of building materials during the 1980s and manufacturing stopped in 1987. Its use was banned completely in Australia from 1 January 2004.

How can I tell if a product or material in my home contains asbestos?

You can't tell if a material contains asbestos just by looking at it. Only scientific testing of a sample can confirm this.

Follow the golden rule – if you think it might be asbestos, treat it like it is.

An asbestos sample must be tested by an asbestos laboratory approved by the National Association of Testing Authorities (NATA).

Competent persons who can collect the sample for you include professional occupational hygienists, whom you can find via a web search or on the Australian Institute of Occupational Hygienists website aioh.org.au and licensed removalists, whom you can find listed on worksafe.vic.gov.au.

For more on testing accreditation, you can phone NATA on 1800 621 666 or visit nata.com.au

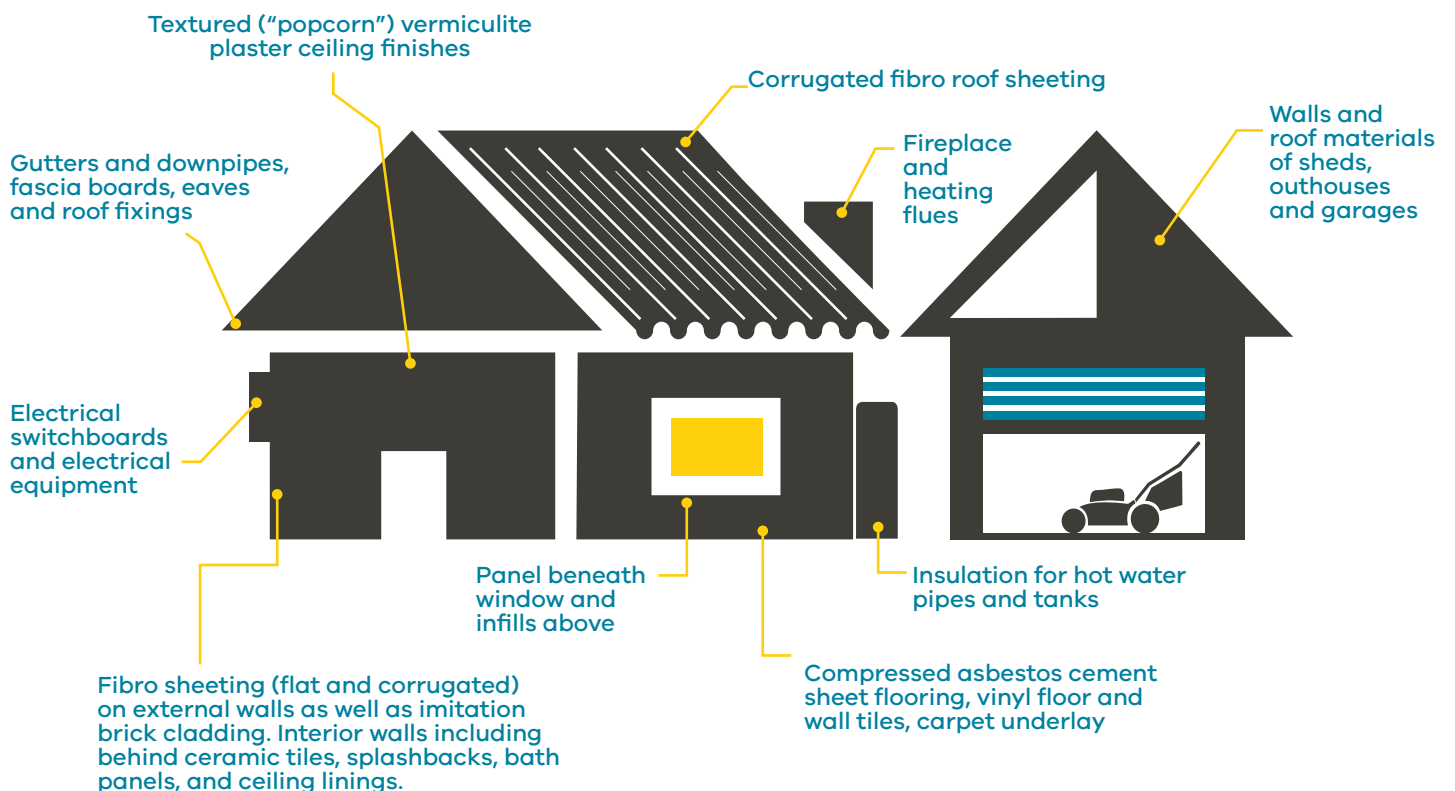




Where am I likely to find asbestos?

Because of its popularity as a building material, many homes built in Victoria before 1990 are likely to contain asbestos in some form. The image below shows some of the common places it can be found.

You can also use the interactive tool on asbestos.vic.gov.au which will guide you through locations where asbestos could be found in the home.



Remnants of asbestos can also be found in soils where old sheds or houses have been demolished in the past



Why is asbestos dangerous?

Asbestos can be hazardous to your health. Breathing in asbestos fibres can lead to diseases such as asbestosis, lung cancer and mesothelioma. These diseases can take decades to develop and have no known cure. They can cause debilitating illness and premature death. This is why precautions should be taken to minimise exposure to airborne asbestos fibres.

Types of asbestos

There are two categories of asbestos building materials - **"non-friable"** and **"friable"**.



Non-friable (also known as **"bonded"**) asbestos products are made from a bonding compound (such as cement) mixed with asbestos. They are solid and rigid, with the asbestos fibres tightly bound within them and generally less likely to be released into the air. Examples of non-friable asbestos include asbestos cement (AC) sheeting (fibro) and vinyl asbestos floor tiles.



Friable asbestos products are defined as materials that can be crumbled, pulverised, or reduced to a powder by hand pressure when dry. Typically, asbestos fibres are more easily released into the air from friable products. Examples of friable asbestos include insulation around hot water pipes and asbestos rope.

What should I do about the asbestos in my home?

Asbestos is usually non-friable in residential buildings, except for items such as lining of electrical switchboards and backing on vinyl floor sheeting.

When it's sealed, undisturbed and in good condition, asbestos-containing material is very low risk because asbestos fibres cannot be released into the air. **It can become a hazard when it's damaged or disturbed.**

If you have asbestos in your home and you're not sure whether it is okay to leave it in place, then engage a competent professional to provide you with a risk assessment. If you end up leaving it in place, ensure it is protected and not disturbed. For example, do not drill holes for downlights in asbestos-containing ceilings or eaves. **Never use high-pressure water** to clean asbestos cement roofs (or any asbestos-containing product). This can result in damage and widespread contamination by releasing asbestos fibres. The clean-up is also very costly.

If you want to have the asbestos removed from your home, or are conducting renovations or rebuilding, **in the majority of cases the law requires you to use a licensed asbestos removalist.** This is also the recommended option in all cases because of the potential health risks involved. You can find a licensed asbestos removalist on the WorkSafe Victoria website at worksafe.vic.gov.au.

Follow the golden rule – if you think it might be asbestos, treat it like it is.

Can I remove asbestos?

Due to the risks of asbestos exposure, it is not recommended that you remove asbestos yourself if you have not done any asbestos awareness training.

When renovating, even asbestos removal by your builder (typically not licensed for asbestos removal) is highly restricted due to the risks involved. The circumstances in which you may remove asbestos are generally only when you as the homeowner do the removal on your own property without any paid help from anyone else. If you are not sure, please contact your local council for advice.

If you decide to remove it yourself, you will need to follow strict safety precautions to protect yourself and others before, during and after the removal process.

You will need personal protective equipment (PPE), which can be bought at retail hardware chains, safety shops and other locations. Some councils provide kits. PPE kits contain the necessary protective clothing and accessories for safe removal and disposal of asbestos.

For more detailed information refer to the separate PPE fact sheet or go to asbestos.vic.gov.au.

Where can asbestos be disposed of safely?

Asbestos waste can only be disposed of at specific landfills throughout Victoria. Check the Environment Protection Authority (EPA) Victoria website for a list of landfills licensed to receive asbestos waste, and make sure you call before you go.

Ensure your asbestos waste has been correctly wrapped, sealed and clearly labelled "asbestos waste." If you engage a licensed asbestos removalist they will do this for you.

For more information on asbestos disposal go to epa.vic.gov.au

REMEMBER:
There is no known safe level of asbestos exposure



Visit asbestos.vic.gov.au to find out more

Prepared by the Latrobe Valley Asbestos Taskforce for www.asbestos.vic.gov.au

This information in this fact sheet has been adopted with permission from the NSW Environment Protection Authority