

# Is your work building old or new?

If it was built before 1990, it probably contains asbestos. There are legal responsibilities to manage asbestos in the workplace.

## 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 buildings constructed up until 1990.

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 building 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.

We now know that asbestos can be dangerous and people exposed to asbestos fibres may be putting their health at risk.

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.

Therefore, it is unlikely that buildings constructed after 2004 contain asbestos.

**Asbestos registers are required to identify all asbestos that is present in the workplace**

## What are my responsibilities as a business operator?

Workplaces are required by law to have an Asbestos Register that must specify the location and condition of asbestos within the building, whether it is friable or non-friable, the likelihood of asbestos being disturbed by activities in the building, and also any suspected presence of asbestos.

The Asbestos Register must be kept current and reviewed at least every five years.

Any person who works in the building or accesses the building for the purpose of carrying out work that may disturb asbestos, has the legal right to access the register upon request.

The law also requires the Asbestos Register be reviewed before any refurbishing or demolition works commence to ensure that it properly covers the areas being refurbished or demolished.

There are also additional duties outlined in the Occupational Health and Safety Regulations (2017).



## Compliance Code: Managing Asbestos in the Workplace

This compliance code sets out how businesses can meet the obligations set out in 'Part 4 - Asbestos' of the Occupational Health and Safety Regulations (2017).

The Code applies to all:

- persons who have management or control of a workplace
- employers at a workplace where asbestos is present
- employers or self-employed persons performing demolition or refurbishment work at a workplace where asbestos is present
- employers engaged in asbestos-related activities at a workplace.

You can access the Code at [asbestos.vic.gov.au](http://asbestos.vic.gov.au)

## The Asbestos Register: Who is responsible for it?

The owner of the building usually has management control of the building and is responsible for providing and maintaining the Asbestos Register. If the building is leased, the lease agreement will specify who has management control over the building and plant. If you are leasing a property and have the authority to make alterations to the building structure, then you do have a level of management control. It is best to check.

All employers who manage a workplace where asbestos is present have responsibilities to reduce the risk of asbestos exposure as much as is practicably possible. If you know where asbestos is or could be, you will be better able to manage the risks of asbestos exposure and provide a safe work environment for all.

## 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. These products only remain non-friable if they are maintained in a good condition and not left to deteriorate.



**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 lagging/rope. Non-friable material may become friable due to conditions such as fire, exposure to elements or work processes.

## How can I tell if a product or material may contain asbestos?

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

The age of the building can give you an indication of whether it is likely to contain asbestos. Buildings constructed before 1990 are highly likely to contain some asbestos materials.

Some building materials might be directly labelled with words such as 'WARNING: CONTAINS ASBESTOS'. However, materials may contain asbestos even if there isn't a label.

Asbestos found in buildings is usually non-friable and **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.**

An asbestos sample must be tested by an asbestos laboratory approved by the National Association of Testing Authorities (NATA). **Competent persons** who can take the sample include professional occupational hygienists, whom you can find via a web search or on the Australian Institute of Occupational Hygienists website [aioh.org.au](http://aioh.org.au) and licensed removalists, whom you can find listed on [worksafe.vic.gov.au](http://worksafe.vic.gov.au).

For more on testing accreditation, you can phone NATA on 1800 621 666 or visit [nata.com.au](http://nata.com.au)

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

## The Asbestos Register: How do I get one?

An example of an Asbestos Register can be found on [asbestos.vic.gov.au](http://asbestos.vic.gov.au)

Only a suitably experienced or **competent person** can assess a building for the likely presence of asbestos. Asbestos professionals such as occupational hygienists have experience in identifying asbestos and assessing its associated risks ([aioh.org.au](http://aioh.org.au)). Companies approved by NATA may also have competent persons who can carry out asbestos identification in the workplace ([nata.com.au](http://nata.com.au) or phone 1800 621 666).

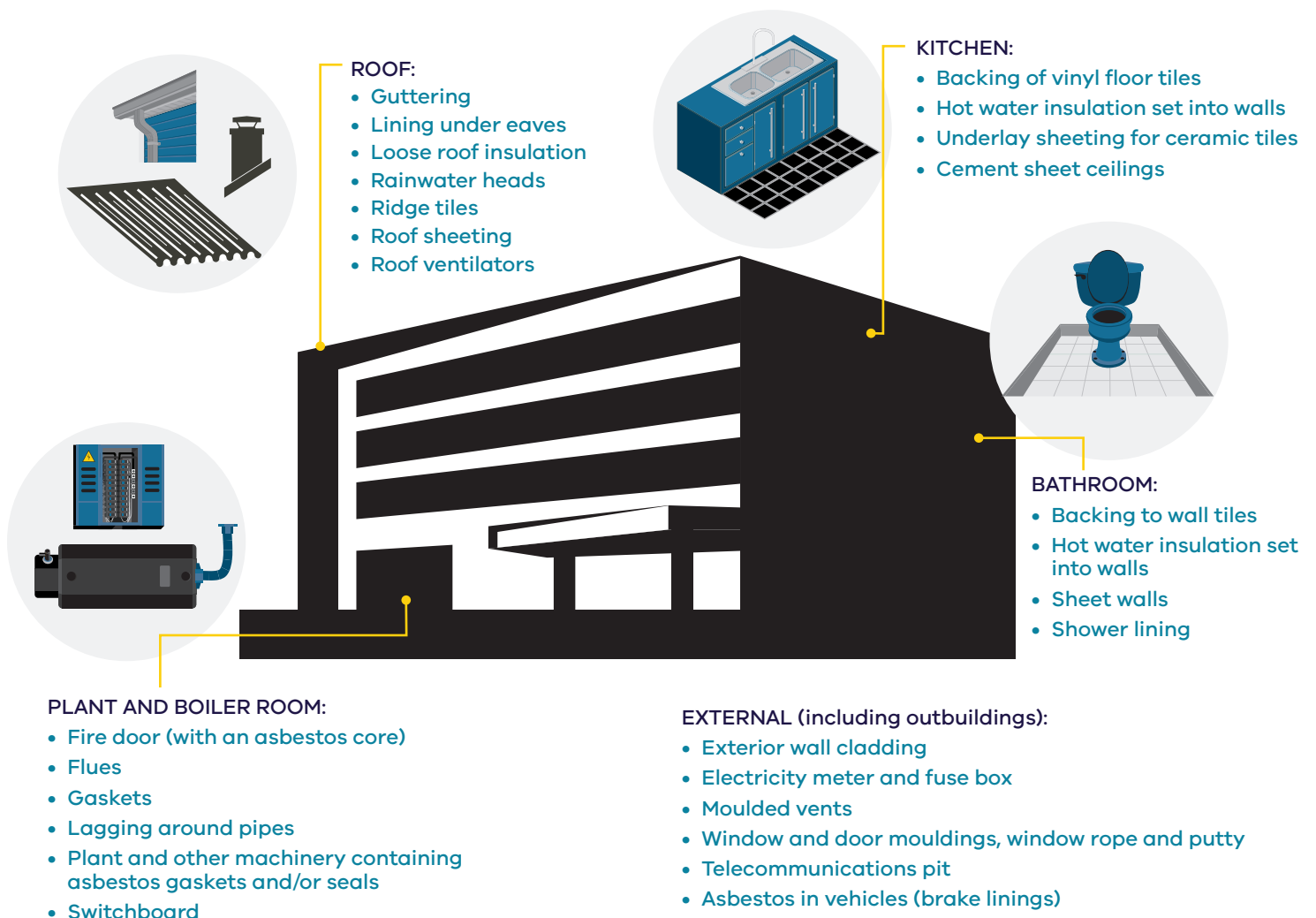
When seeking to engage a competent person, questions should be asked regarding the experience that person has in undertaking asbestos assessments. Experience in similar types of workplaces may also be desirable.

Information regarding the competent person's experience, and survey scope and limitations, is often provided by the competent person in a written document such as a quotation or work proposal.

## Where am I likely to find asbestos?

Because of its popularity as a building material, many buildings constructed 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](http://asbestos.vic.gov.au) which will guide you through locations where asbestos could be found in the workplace.



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



## Asbestos removal

Any refurbishment or demolition works involving asbestos removal at a workplace must be undertaken by appropriately qualified licensed removalists. Limited asbestos removal (up to 10m<sup>2</sup> non-friable) can also be undertaken.

You can find a licensed asbestos removalist on the WorkSafe Victoria website at [worksafe.vic.gov.au](https://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au)

The Compliance Code: *Removing asbestos in workplaces* provides practical guidance for those whose work involves removing asbestos.

If you have asbestos in your workplace and you're not sure whether it is okay to leave it in place, then engage a **competent person** to provide you with a risk assessment. If you end up leaving it in place, ensure it is protected and not disturbed.

**Do not drill/hammer/nail/screw/saw/cut/damage** any product that may contain asbestos unless you are strictly following the guidelines in the compliance code

for managing asbestos in the workplace. **Never use high-pressure water** to clean asbestos cement walls or 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, and fines may also be incurred.

## Tax deductions for environmental protection activities

A new taxation ruling announced by the Australian Taxation Office in 2020 (TR 2020/2) means businesses may qualify for an immediate full tax deduction for asbestos assessments and for the removal of asbestos-containing materials. Please check with your accountant to see if you qualify.

**REMEMBER:**  
**There is no known safe level of asbestos exposure**



**Visit [asbestos.vic.gov.au](https://www.asbestos.vic.gov.au) to find out more**



Prepared by the Latrobe Valley Asbestos Taskforce for  
[www.asbestos.vic.gov.au](https://www.asbestos.vic.gov.au)

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