



## **FACT SHEET ON ASBESTOS SAFETY**

### **WHAT IS ASBESTOS?**

Asbestos is a naturally occurring substance that has been mined and processed for thousands of years. The term asbestos refers to six types of naturally occurring mineral fibres including chrysotile ('white' asbestos) and crocidolite ('blue' asbestos).

### **Asbestos usage in Australia**

Australia was one of the highest per capita users in the world in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Asbestos was extensively used in the building and construction, shipping and manufacturing industries in many and varied products.

An estimated one third of homes built between 1945 and the late 1980s may contain asbestos in areas such as ceilings, internal walls, roofs, eaves, external cladding, wet areas and vinyl floor tiles. Asbestos was also included in products such as brake pads, gaskets and seals, pipes and pipe lagging.

The manufacture, importation and installation of products containing crocidolite and amosite was banned from 1985. By the late 1980s, the use of asbestos in building products was banned. On 31 December 2003, a national ban on all uses of chrysotile asbestos came into effect. However the widespread use of asbestos has left a deadly legacy.

### **Asbestos related diseases**

The World Health Organisation (WHO) states that asbestos causes cancer and other diseases, including pleural disease, asbestosis, lung cancer and mesothelioma. Asbestos only poses a risk to health when asbestos fibres are breathed in. The WHO found that there is no exposure level below which carcinogenic effects would not occur.

Australia has the highest reported per capita incidence of asbestos-related disease in the world, including the highest incidence of mesothelioma. In 2010, 642 Australians died from mesothelioma. Due to the long period between asbestos exposure and the onset of the disease, the numbers of diagnosed cases of asbestos related diseases will continue to rise. In the next 20 years, an estimated 30,000 to 40,000 Australians will be diagnosed with an asbestos-related disease - and these diseases are not forecast to peak until 2020.

### **WHO DO I CONTACT ABOUT ASBESTOS?**

#### *At work*

- Asbestos in the workplace is primarily regulated by state, territory and local governments and work, health and safety regulators in each state or territory.





- For specific information on how asbestos is regulated in your jurisdiction, please visit <http://www.asbestossafety.gov.au/node/26#regulators>
- Further information on identifying asbestos, creating an asbestos register for a workplace, and managing the risks of asbestos in the workplace can be found on Safe Work Australia's website at [www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/sites/swa/about/publications/pages/manage-control-asbestos-cop](http://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/sites/swa/about/publications/pages/manage-control-asbestos-cop)
- For concerns regarding telecommunication pit work as a result of the NBN rollout, please contact Comcare on 1300 366 979 between 8.30am and 5.00pm AEST Monday to Friday.

#### *At home*

- Homeowners and DIY renovators should be aware that asbestos becomes unsafe when its disturbed, cut, sanded or exposed to the environment. Before starting home renovations, take the time to ensure asbestos is not present.
- The Asbestos Diseases Foundation of Australia website [www.adfa.org.au](http://www.adfa.org.au) has information on the types of asbestos materials commonly found in homes.

#### *Disposal contact information*

- If you want asbestos removed from your home, only use a qualified licensed asbestos removalist to ensure the asbestos is safely and properly removed. You can find details of licensed removalists via work health and safety regulators in each state or territory.
- Asbestos is primarily regulated by state, territory and local government. Contact details for authorities responsible for asbestos in each jurisdiction is available at <http://www.asbestossafety.gov.au/node/26#EPA>

#### **ASBESTOS HOTLINE – 1800 888 468**

- For information and advice on asbestos related concerns, call the National Asbestos Hotline on 1800 888 468 Monday to Friday between 8.30 am and 5.00 pm (AEST).

#### **NATIONAL ASBESTOS EXPOSURE REGISTER**

- If you think you may have been exposed to asbestos containing materials you can register your details on the National Asbestos Exposure Register.
- To register, visit the Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency's website at <http://www.asbestossafety.gov.au/register> or write to Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency at GPO Box 9880, CANBERRA ACT, 2601.

