

Asbestos in a disaster AFTER A STORM.

Safe handling and disposal after a storm

PLAN. PREPARE. SURVIVE.

Houses built before 1990 are likely to contain asbestos. Asbestos can have dangerous health effects, but the risk can be minimised if handled correctly.

The following information is intended to help you assess your property for asbestos materials. You can then be better prepared to minimise the health risks these potential asbestos areas can present if damaged in a disaster event.

What is asbestos?

Asbestos is a naturally occurring mineral containing fibres that have strong durability, fire resistance and insulating properties. Asbestos is a known carcinogen (can cause cancer) but only poses a health risk if fibres small enough to be breathed into our lungs become airborne and are inhaled.

Where is asbestos found?

It can be difficult to tell whether a house has materials containing asbestos just by looking. As a general rule, if a house was built:

- before 1985 - it is highly likely that it would have some materials containing asbestos
- between 1985 and 1990 - it is likely that it would have materials containing asbestos
- after 1990 - it is highly unlikely it would have materials containing asbestos.

Common locations

Asbestos is commonly located in:

- eaves
- garage/shed
- property fence
- bathroom
- laundry
- kitchen
- walls.

Common materials

Asbestos is commonly found in:

- flat, corrugated or bitumen roofing material
- ceiling tiles
- vinyl and thermoplastic floor tiles and backing to vinyl flooring
- carpet underlay (Hessian)
- wall sheeting, internal and external, textured coatings
- gutters, rainwater pipes and water tanks
- insulation around pipes and electrical equipment
- fire proofing around flues and ducts
- sprayed onto steelwork.

More information regarding common locations of asbestos in your home can be found at worksafe.qld.gov.au/safety-and-prevention/hazards/hazardous-exposures/airborne-contaminants/asbestos

Licensed contractors

The best and safest way for you and your family to clean up asbestos is to engage a licensed contractor. Details of licensed contractors can be obtained by contacting Workplace Health and Safety Queensland on 1300 362 128, or visiting their website.

Note that where there is extensive damage, more than 10m² of asbestos containing material being removed, demolition or repair work required, or the asbestos is friable, then it must be undertaken by a licensed contractor.

It is essential that you protect yourself, your family and others when removing debris, particularly when handling potential asbestos-containing materials. Asbestos fibres can be released through sawing, drilling or breaking up asbestos, or through inadequate disposal of materials.

Clean-up kit in the event of a storm or cyclone

Prepare an asbestos clean-up kit in case of damage. The kit should contain:

- latex gloves
- marker pen
- paper
- masking tape
- builders plastic or plastic bags
- disposable P2 mask
- disposable coveralls
- boot covers.



Know how to handle and clean up asbestos safely

Asbestos poses a health risk during removal, packaging, transport and disposal, so it is important to handle it with great caution. You can remove asbestos safely by:

- keeping other household members and pets away
- wearing personal protective equipment
- wetting the asbestos materials before handling with either a garden hose or using a PVA glue and water solution
- separating the asbestos from other waste material.
- laying the asbestos pieces on two layers of builders plastic or inside a thick plastic bag, double wrap and seal the plastic with tape
- labelling the wrapped material with “Caution Asbestos”
- transporting the material safely as per directions in the *Code of Practice for the Safe Removal of Asbestos* (2011)
- disposing of the asbestos at one of council’s landfill facilities that accept asbestos waste (see Council’s website for more information on disposing of asbestos).

Hints and tips

How to Safely Remove Asbestos
– Code of Practice available
worksafe.qld.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0023/72635/how-to-safely-remove-asbestos-cop-2021.pdf

Do not:

- remove asbestos materials unless absolutely necessary
- break asbestos materials into smaller pieces as asbestos fibres can be released
- use power tools, any abrasive materials or cut asbestos into sheets
- use high pressure water cleaners or water blasters on asbestos cement roofs
- walk on corrugated asbestos roofs – they can collapse under the weight.
- use compressed air to clean down any surfaces contaminated with asbestos – this will disperse fibres into the air
- use domestic vacuum cleaners or brooms to clean up asbestos dust
- slide asbestos sheeting over another when stacking sheets, as this may release asbestos fibres.

Do:

- wet asbestos materials when using non-powered hand tools or low-speed battery-operated tools
- wet fibro gently during removal—take care on roofs as fibro can be brittle and slippery when wet
- wet down all asbestos dust and wipe it up with cleaning rags—used rags should be placed in bags and sealed for removal with other asbestos waste
- wear personal protective equipment such as disposable coveralls and disposable P2 masks
- wash your hands, shower and wash your hair thoroughly after handling asbestos material
- package, label and transport asbestos appropriately
- dispose of asbestos correctly at Council’s approved waste facilities.

More information

If you need more information, contact Council on 13 48 10 or visit Council’s website at townsville.qld.gov.au.

Information about disasters in Townsville can be found on the Disaster Dashboard at disaster.townsville.qld.gov.au.