

FAQs: Asbestos in Schools

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GENERAL INFORMATION:

What is asbestos? Where can asbestos be found?

Asbestos is a naturally occurring mineral made up of many small fibres. These fibres are very strong and are highly resistant to heat, fire, chemicals and wear.

See the [WorkSafe website](#) for information and posters on where asbestos can be found.

Who is responsible for identifying and managing risks arising from asbestos in schools?

The Health and Safety at Work (Asbestos) Regulations 2016 places a requirement on a Person Conducting a Business or Undertaking (PCBU) – meaning the School Boards and Principals in a school setting – to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that all asbestos in schools is identified and if so, any risks arising from the asbestos are managed to eliminate or minimise exposure.

To assist you, the Ministry has developed an [asbestos management process](#) to ensure asbestos is managed in schools both on a day-to-day basis and during Ministry construction projects.

How can I know if there is asbestos in our school?

The best way to know if there is asbestos in your school will be to employ a qualified asbestos surveyor to assess your building.

Generally, if your school building was built prior to 1 January 2000, it is likely to have asbestos containing materials and you can assume that your school building has asbestos. Follow the WorkSafe Approved Code of Practice Guidance to identify what is likely to contain asbestos. Seek for the help of an experienced or competent person, which could include your own staff who have undergone appropriate training, to conduct a visual inspection. Take note that staff should

not damage the suspected asbestos in any way when making this determination, and correct personal protective equipment (PPE) should be worn.

What is the difference between friable and non-friable asbestos?

Friable asbestos is in a powder form or is able to be crumbled, pulverised, or reduced to a powder by hand pressure when dry. While all asbestos has the potential to become airborne, friable is more likely to become airborne and is far more of a health hazard and therefore requires more stringent and costly removal practices.

Non-friable asbestos is not in a powder form or cannot be crumbled, pulverised, or reduced to a powder by hand pressure when dry. It is usually reinforced with a bonding compound.

IMPORTANT:

Non-friable asbestos may become friable through time as the product becomes old and weathered. Get a qualified asbestos surveyor to assess your building.

DEALING WITH ASBESTOS:

Why does our school have asbestos?

Buildings built prior to 1 January 2000 are likely to contain asbestos containing materials (ACMs). The use of building materials containing asbestos was widespread in New Zealand and overseas until the late 1990s because of its fire-resistance properties.

How will we know if we've been exposed to asbestos? Will students/staff get sick?

The main exposure to asbestos is from breathing in airborne asbestos fibres. The risk of asbestos-related disease is directly related to the amount of asbestos and length of exposure.

To find out more about the health risks of exposure to asbestos, you can visit the [Ministry of Health website](#).

If we are engaging a contractor to do some construction work in our school, is there anything I should give them or let them know to avoid potential asbestos contamination?

Before starting any construction work, your contractor must see your Asbestos Management Plan.

If your building is assumed to have asbestos, the contractor needs to undertake further identification asbestos presence – a demolition or refurbishment survey is required.

I don't have an Asbestos Management Plan. What is that and how do I get one?

An Asbestos Management Plan sets out where any identified asbestos or asbestos-containing material is present, and how it will be managed. If you, or a surveyor identify or assume the presence of asbestos in your school, an Asbestos Management Plan is required.

School Principals and/or School Boards, as PCBU in a school setting, is responsible for making sure that an Asbestos Management Plan is available. While you can do this yourself by following the process outlined in [WorkSafe's approved code practice](#), we highly encourage you to get a qualified asbestos surveyor to assist you and ensure that you have a proper plan in place.

ASBESTOS REMOVAL WORKS:

When is asbestos dangerous?

When should asbestos be removed?

If the asbestos or ACM is in good condition and undisturbed, it is unlikely that airborne asbestos fibres will be released. In this situation, the risk to health is low.

REMEMBER:

Asbestos removal work must be carried out by a licensed asbestos remover. A list of current asbestos removal licence holders can be found on [WorkSafe website](#).

If the asbestos or ACM is found to be in poor condition and there is a risk of exposure to respirable fibres, you will need to take steps to eliminate or minimise the risk. This could include eliminating the risk by removing the asbestos or managing the risk.

Who is responsible for removing asbestos?

Asbestos removal work must be carried out by a licensed asbestos remover. They must prepare and deliver an asbestos removal control plan. The WorkSafe website has more information about the duties of a licensed asbestos remover [here](#).

You can also find a list of current asbestos removal licence holders [here](#).

How will the asbestos removal be funded?

The cost of managing or removing asbestos safely is part of the project costs. If this causes a major overrun in the project's budget, help may be available and you should speak to your property advisor.

If asbestos removal is required, who should initiate the communication with our school community? Who else should be informed?

As the PCBU in control of the school, Boards and/or Principals have a responsibility for managing asbestos in their schools. This includes informing everyone who may be affected by the asbestos removal works, such as the students (through their parents), school staff and other people who regularly visit or work within your school environment (e.g. cleaners, trades people, etc.), and the people in the school's neighbouring properties.

You can refer to this [Communications Guidance for Asbestos Management](#) for more information.

We also have a Template for [Notice of Asbestos Removal Work](#) that you can use.

Is the Ministry able to help with communications to the community?

If you would like help keeping your community updated, please talk to your property advisor. The Ministry will assign a communications advisor to assist you.

Do we need to destroy everything in the affected area that may have been contaminated by asbestos (e.g. carpet, books, tables, chairs, etc.)?

In the event of asbestos contamination, all soft items (e.g. carpets, curtains, etc.) that can absorb fibres need to be destroyed. They generally can't be cleaned, so they immediately become contaminated waste.

Hard objects (e.g. chairs, tables, etc.) can be decontaminated and cleared for use by a licensed assessor.

How soon can we go back on site after an asbestos removal?

You need to secure a clearance from an independent licensed asbestos assessor (LAA) before going back on site. You can't be allowed back into the area until it is cleared by the licensed assessor.

What is air monitoring? How long does the air need to be monitored?

Air monitoring is used to test the air for the presence of airborne asbestos fibres. An independent person (normally an LAA) must be engaged to conduct air monitoring for all asbestos removal works in school, regardless of the Class (Class A Friable or Class B Non-Friable), size, length or type of removal.

Air monitors must run before, during and after removal. This provides the Ministry and the school community with assurance that no person has been exposed to unsafe levels of airborne asbestos.

IMPORTANT:

The LAA must be financially independent from the asbestos removalist. If the situation involves the Ministry of Education or any other business engaging the removalist, then the removalist cannot engage the LAA.

A list of LAAs is available on the WorkSafe website [here](#).

Where can I get more information?

The Ministry of Education website has further information about the management of asbestos and procedures to ensure the safety of all involved [here](#).

The Ministry of Health website contains information about the health risks of exposure to asbestos [here](#).

WorkSafe New Zealand also provides information on asbestos [here](#).

If you need further clarification, you can email TPHM.HealthandSafety@education.govt.nz