

Cleaning up after the floods? Exposed to asbestos?

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Since 1919

The volunteer support of thousands of Australians who are helping friends, neighbours and strangers clean houses and businesses after the floods has been a wonderful show of strength and community pride. However, anyone who is cleaning up is reminded that there are occupational health and safety risks, and in some situations, people may be exposed to asbestos.

What is asbestos?

Asbestos is a strong and heat resistant material that was commonly used in Australian buildings built from the 1950s through to 1985. It was used in more than 3000 products.

Flood victims and volunteers may be exposed to **asbestos fibres and asbestos dust** when demolishing and removing asbestos products including cement sheeting for walls and roofing; acoustic ceilings; lagging on pipes for insulation; fireproofing; vinyl flooring and tiles; lining behind stoves, heaters and radiators; and spackle in plaster and paints.

How can I protect myself from asbestos exposure?

Wear an approved respirator mask and protective clothing while you are cleaning up after the floods, even if you don't think there are any asbestos products. Note that if you handle asbestos products your clothes may be contaminated with asbestos dust, so you should wear your mask when handling them prior to being washed.

Asbestos products should be disposed of professionally. Your local council should be able to advise you if there is an asbestos material collection after the floods, or the name of a professional asbestos removalist. Don't throw asbestos products out with regular household hard waste because this will potentially put other people at risk of asbestos exposure and will contaminate all of the waste.

How do I know if I am handling asbestos products?

It's not always easy to tell if the products you are handling contain asbestos. The best rule of thumb is to ask or check if you are unsure prior to handling an item. If you are still unsure, notify your local council and then move on and work in another area with products you know are safe. Note that there is **no safe level of exposure to asbestos fibres**, so it is better to be on the safe side.

What should I do if I've been exposed?

Don't panic. Most people who have been exposed to the dangerous fibres don't go on to contract a related disease. Asbestos-related diseases often take between 10 and 30 years to develop. If you are concerned, you should see your doctor.

People involved in the flood clean up can also register their asbestos exposure for free on the National Asbestos Register. This quick and easy online register lists the details of your exposure. Even though you are currently healthy, your details are secure on the register in case you later go on to be diagnosed with an asbestos-related disease. If this happens, the register will help us to assist you in a future claim for compensation. Registration is at no cost and is obligation free.

Where do I go for more information?

To add your details to the National Asbestos Register, go to www.mauriceblackburn.com.au, select 'asbestos' from the practice areas, and follow the link. You can also join the register by filling in the form at the back of our hardcopy asbestos brochure. If you would like a copy of our asbestos brochure, or you have another asbestos query, please email us at asbestos@mauriceblackburn.com.au or call us on freecall 1800 810 812.

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