

# After a fire: asbestos hazards

## Community information

This information is being provided to residents and property owners affected by bushfires. It aims to help address concerns about asbestos fibres and should be read with other information about asbestos, provided at the end of this fact sheet.

## How do I know if asbestos was used on my property?

Asbestos was commonly used in all types of buildings (including homes and sheds) that were built before 1990. It was used mostly in asbestos cement (AC) in walls and in roofs, floor underlays, eaves and chimney flues, and in vinyl floor tiles and as backing to lino.

## Is asbestos dangerous?

AC building products are usually made up of 5–15 per cent asbestos by weight. Since the mid-1980s, cement sheeting has been produced in Australia without any asbestos content. If the material is thought to be older than 1990, it is reasonable to assume that it contains asbestos, and testing is not generally required. The asbestos in these products is tightly bound because they contain cement and are compressed in manufacturing.

Many studies have shown that levels of hazardous fibres freely released from these products are very low. However, during activities such as power sawing, sanding and drilling, breathable fibres can be released into the air. Do not undertake any such activities with these products without specialist advice.

Asbestos fibres create a health risk when inhaled into the lungs. Fibres that stay attached to cement or in ash and debris caused by a fire do not pose a health risk to visitors to the building or to the public unless the fibres are disturbed and then breathed in.

## My house was damaged by fire. Am I at risk from asbestos fibres?

Research has shown that house fires involving asbestos-containing materials do not result in levels of asbestos fibres in the surrounding area high enough to cause a risk to health. This is because during a fire, the amount of asbestos fibres released into the air is relatively low.



However, asbestos clumps and some fibres may remain on the property and cause a risk if the ash or debris is disturbed and inhaled.

If you are just visiting a property but not cleaning up, to minimise exposure to airborne dust and other hazards from fire-damaged homes, wear protective clothing, including:

- sturdy footwear and heavy-duty work gloves
- disposable coveralls (with long sleeves and trousers)
- P2 face masks.

If asbestos-containing materials have been burnt on your property or you are uncertain, a licensed asbestos removalist should be used to perform the clean-up work.

## For further information

Call 13 HEALTH (13 43 25 84) at any time.

Contact 13 QGOV (13 74 68) for your nearest Public Health Unit.

Queensland Government Asbestos website:

[www.deir.qld.gov.au/asbestos/](http://www.deir.qld.gov.au/asbestos/)

Better Health Channel 2016, Asbestos and your health:

[betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/asbestos-and-your-health](http://betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/asbestos-and-your-health)

enHealth 2013, Asbestos: A guide for householders and the general public:

[www.health.gov.au/internet/publications/publishing.nsf/Content/asbestos-toc](http://www.health.gov.au/internet/publications/publishing.nsf/Content/asbestos-toc)

Noel Arnold & Associates 2006, Report on the investigation of the effect of fire on asbestos fibre contamination. This report is available for downloading [here](#).

*Queensland Health acknowledges the State of Victoria, Health and Human Services, for permission to use their fact sheet content.*