



FAQs: Asbestos in Schools

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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 the 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.

The New Zealand School Property Agency (NZSPA) supports schools by providing relevant asbestos, health and safety and construction guidance. We have useful information and resources readily available on our website: www.schoolproperty.govt.nz/day-to-day-management/hazardous-materials-and-substances/managing-asbestos-in-schools.

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 presume that your school building has asbestos. Follow the WorkSafe's Approved Code of Practice to provide you with a source of reference to what is likely to contain asbestos. Engage the services of a qualified and experienced asbestos

surveyor to identify and sample suspected asbestos containing materials. The surveyor will assist in creating an asbestos register for the school, which will help determine the risk of asbestos containing materials through a combination of material and priority risk assessments.

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

Friable asbestos is in a powder form or can be crumbled, pulverised, or reduced to 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 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. The use of building materials containing asbestos was widespread in New Zealand and overseas until the late 1990s because of its fire-resistance properties, strength and insulating capabilities.

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. The contractor should pay particular attention to the asbestos register, site plans and photographs relevant to the location where they will be conducting work.

If your building is presumed to have asbestos, the contractor needs to undertake further investigation for the presence of asbestos – 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. To identify where the asbestos is located, you will need to arrange for an asbestos management survey to be completed. This type of survey will help identify all potential asbestos containing materials and form the basis of the Asbestos Management Plan.

If asbestos is identified or presumed to be present at your school, an Asbestos Management Plan is required.

School Principals and/or School Boards, as PCBUs in a school setting, are responsible for making sure that their school has an Asbestos Management Plan. While you can do this yourself by following the process outlined in WorkSafe's Approved Code of Practice, we highly encourage you to get a qualified asbestos surveyor to assist you and ensure that you have a proper plan in place.

Can I use high-pressure water spray to wash down buildings presumed to have asbestos?

High-pressure water sprays can be extremely destructive and must not be used to clean asbestos containing materials as it can disturb asbestos fibres and potentially spread them throughout the environment.

The use of a soft brush to wash down school buildings instead of high-pressure water blasting is recommended. You can refer to NZSPA's [Maintenance Guide for Schools | Kura](#) for more information.

Please be aware that under the Health and Safety at Work (Asbestos) Regulations 2016, an individual or business can be infringed up to \$9,000 for using high-pressure water spray or compressed air on asbestos containing materials. They can also face up to \$30,000 fines upon conviction in court.

Important: You should never wash or soft brush unsealed asbestos. It needs to be painted or protected first.

Asbestos removal works

When is asbestos dangerous? When should asbestos be removed?

If an asbestos containing material 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 an asbestos containing material 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 removing the asbestos containing material 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.

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 work, 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.

Asbestos removal work also requires the asbestos removalist to notify WorkSafe at least five (5) days prior to starting any asbestos removal work.

You can refer to the communications guidance for asbestos management available on the NZSPA website: www.schoolproperty.govt.nz/day-to-day-management/hazardous-materials-and-substances/managing-asbestos-in-schools.

Is NZSPA able to help with communications to the community?

If you would like help keeping your community updated, please talk to your Property Advisor. NZSPA 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 retain fibres need to be destroyed. They generally can't be cleaned, so they immediately become contaminated waste. Hard surface objects with easily wipeable surfaces (e.g. chairs, tables, etc.) can be decontaminated and cleared for use by an independent licensed asbestos assessor.

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

You need to receive a clearance from an independent licensed asbestos assessor before going back on site. You can't be allowed back into the area until it is cleared by an independent licensed asbestos 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 a licensed asbestos assessor) must be engaged to conduct air monitoring for all asbestos removal works in a 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 NZSPA and the school community with assurance that no person has been exposed to unsafe levels of airborne asbestos.

Important: The licensed asbestos assessor or LAA must be financially independent from the asbestos removalist. Your licensed asbestos removalist cannot sub-contract nor directly engage the licensed asbestos assessor issuing the clearance certificate.

A list of licensed asbestos assessors is available on the [WorkSafe website](#).

Where can I get more information?

The [New Zealand School Property Agency website](#) has information about the management of asbestos and procedures to ensure the safety of all involved.

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

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

If you need further clarification on the management of asbestos, or assistance with assessing your asbestos removal control plan prior to work commencing, you can email HealthandSafety@schoolproperty.govt.nz.