

CFMEU Policy for Asbestos Removal

The danger of asbestos is that it is a fibrous material that will fracture along its length into pieces so small that they are invisible to the naked eye and have the potential easily become airborne after being disturbed. They can then be inhaled and become lodged in the lungs and cause diseases such as mesothelioma and asbestos-related lung cancer.

There are six types of asbestos¹ and they are used in two different formats, bonded and friable. Friable asbestos is the most dangerous form of asbestos and the controls for it should be the most stringent.

The precautions that have been developed nationally for the containment and exclusion of asbestos² involve steps which ensure all possible fibres are prevented from becoming airborne in areas where unprotected people may be exposed to them and where asbestos works are being carried out, so that people are adequately protected from being endangered.

These procedures include requirements for building owners to carry an asbestos audit that details the location, type and quantity of asbestos material present in the building. This audit should provide the condition and removal priorities on which the building owner can base their removal program. Asbestos Removal Companies require a nominated license holder. The requirements for the issue of a license are a minimum of eight years experience of which four years must have been in a supervisory capacity.

All asbestos removal projects should be under the control of at least a qualified asbestos supervisor who has a minimum four years' experience in asbestos removal and works under the guidance of a license holder.

After identification there are four main stages to asbestos removal: set-up, removal, decontamination, and disposal. For all asbestos removal works there should be quality assurance checks on each of these stages to ensure public safety and the safety of those carrying out the work. For bonded asbestos works these checks can be carried out by the license holder or supervisor. Friable work requires these checks to be carried out by an

¹ *Asbestos*, the fibrous form of the mineral silicates belonging to the serpentine and amphibole groups of rock-forming minerals, including the following:

- (a) actinolite;
- (b) amosite (brown asbestos);
- (c) anthophyllite;
- (d) chrysotile (white asbestos);
- (e) crocidolite (blue asbestos);
- (f) tremolite;

² National Code of Practice for the Safe Removal of Asbestos 2nd Edition [NOHS:2002(2005)]

independent “A Class” assessor.

Set-up for friable asbestos removal

Set-up requirements are to ensure that the area containing asbestos is isolated from the rest of the building. This is normally achieved by creating an airtight enclosure around the asbestos removal area with negative air pressure sufficient to allow for a minimum of 4 complete changes of air within the removal area every hour. This area should be constructed with 200um plastic and should be “smoke tested” by an “A Class” asbestos assessor to ensure there are no leaks. The assessor also checks that the area is fit for use to do the specified works in a safe and compliant manner. The “A Class” assessor should also examine the Safe Work Method Statement prepared by the removalist company as a qualified assessor of correct procedures (currently not a requirement).

Removal of friable asbestos

All asbestos removal procedures should be detailed in the Safe Work Method Statement (SWMS), designed for each removal project, and signed off by the asbestos assessor. Random inspections should be carried out by the assessor during the course of the work (The inspections and assessors assessment of the SWMS are not current requirements in Australia). For each job there should be a license holder or qualified supervisor on site at all times and they should answer to the assessor who acts on behalf of the client. This type of work should only be done in shifts of a maximum of 6hrs per day due to the constraints of wearing full PPE on a workers’ performance and ability to maintain attention to detail. At all times a “Nipper” should be stationed outside the removal area to provide assistance to the removal crew. They also have the role of making sure all safety equipment is functioning correctly while removal is in progress.

Personal decontamination when leaving the asbestos removal area while removal is in progress is as follows:

- Enter dirty shower from removal area. Wash outer layer until free of asbestos.
- Enter dirty change. Remove and bag all outer clothing used in the removal area that may be impregnated with asbestos.
- Enter the clean shower and wash completely removing all clothing and decontaminating mask and battery pack (for air supplied asbestos removal).
- Enter dry change and put on uncontaminated dry clothing with.

“Bagging out” procedures for friable asbestos.

- All material (and tools) to be bagged or wrapped in the removal area, then washed out through the showers with a person in each stage of the showers who is able to continue the process in each stage of the decontamination.

Decontamination practices for friable asbestos

First the area is inspected by the "A Class" assessor to ensure that all the asbestos has been removed. Then vacuumed, "wet wiped" and sprayed down with PVA, and initial clearance monitors placed by the assessor for a minimum of 2 hours. Once satisfactory results have been obtained, final clearance monitors will be placed in the work area during demobilisation of the work area to ensure the area is completely decontaminated.

Disposal of asbestos (bonded and friable asbestos)

The disposal of asbestos should be to a licensed asbestos waste facility and receipts of disposal should be provided to the client to show that the all asbestos contaminated material has been properly disposed of and is no longer a risk.

The waste disposal facility then takes responsibility for the asbestos and is responsible for ensuring it is kept in a safe, stable manner.

These procedures ensure that all people concerned with the handling of asbestos are as safe as possible. The proper costing and planning for asbestos works as well as the proper regulation will ensure that asbestos removalists are able to operate in a safe manner that is compliant with the regulations and do not receive pressure to use unsafe or reckless work methods.