



Chapter 3

Asbestos

After decades of campaigning by unions and other groups, Australia banned the importation and exporting of any asbestos product on 31 December 2003. However, as other countries have not banned its use, asbestos products are still coming in - e.g. gaskets, electrical switchboards, rail locomotives, building products etc.

The use of asbestos containing building materials was extensive in Australia. Asbestos containing materials - ACMs - can be found in many residential homes and old buildings. Unless it is known when the ACMs were removed, many buildings built before the mid-1980s are likely to contain ACMs.

The Asbestos Safety Eradication Agency website contains useful information on what to do if ACMs are suspected in residential buildings.

It is very important to keep vigilant, and until it is proved otherwise, treat anything suspected of containing asbestos, as asbestos.

The Regulations

The PCBU/employer has a duty of care, under health and safety law, to keep the work environment free of asbestos fibres.

Asbestos Regulations require the removal of ACMs to be done by qualified asbestos removalists. The Asbestos Regulations and Codes clearly state how the removal work must be done, what precautions must be taken and how ACMs are to be disposed.

3. Asbestos

Workplaces must have an Asbestos Register which must be kept up to date. As a minimum, make sure your employer follows these basic steps:

- Inspect the workplace for asbestos. Common sites include roofing and walls, behind electrical switchboards or heaters, insulation materials, vinyl tiles, gaskets and brakes.
- Label the asbestos and mark it for removal. If removal cannot be done in the short term, make sure it is made safe and there is an agreed timetable for removal.
- If suspicious material is found, then immediately follow the steps:
 - Cease work
 - Remove all workers from the area
 - Report to HSR and delegates
 - Laboratory test and identify the material
 - Seal the material with polyethylene bags, by licensed asbestos workers.
- Removal of the material must be done by removalists approved by union and the health and safety regulator.

Remember

Never replace non-asbestos parts with asbestos parts.

Asbestos gasket removal

AMWU members may come across suspicious gaskets/brakes and clutches. Take the following steps:

- Cordon off and signpost the removal area
- As much as possible, enclose the removal work
- Always use hand tools as they create less dust
- Always damp down with fine mist. Collect the waste water containing the dust fibres
- Use exhaust ventilation over any filing, drilling, sanding and grinding.
- Always use an industrial vacuum cleaner with a high efficiency particulate air filter. Some of these have special fittings that fit around the job. Never blow or use compressed air to remove dust or to help remove gaskets.
- Never sweep and never use power tools on dry asbestos gaskets
- Use disposable overalls - dust can travel home
- Dispose of asbestos parts and containers in thick polyethylene bags to the licensed waste contractors.

AMWU Asbestos Exposure Letter

If workers are potentially exposed to asbestos, please get your employer to fill out this asbestos exposure letter. Keep a copy of the signed letter. If the PCBU/employer refuses to sign, then a statutory declaration from co-workers is also a useful document to keep as a record of potential exposure.

Additionally, report the exposure to the Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency.

If you are in Queensland – you should report your exposures to WorkCover – other states do not have the same service.

To whom it may concern:

Name (of worker): _____

Workplace details: _____

Employer:

Address of employer: _____

Workplace location: _____

(please write 'as above' if the same address as employer)

Duration of employment: _____

Analysis

An analysis has been done on the asbestos material by:

(Name of company or suitably qualified person conducting the test)

Date of test: _____

Type of asbestos: _____

3. Asbestos

Exposure

Duration of the presence of asbestos in situ (if known): _____

Nature of asbestos material: _____
(use, application)

Circumstances of exposure (strike out those not applicable):

- Exposure has occurred while asbestos material was in situ.
- Exposure has occurred during removal operation(s).
- Exposure has occurred after removal operation(s).

It is acknowledged that the above-named worker was exposed to airborne asbestos fibres in the course of his/her employment.

Signed on behalf of the employer: _____

Name of the employer representative: _____
(block letters)

Title of the employer representative: _____

Date signed: _____ / _____ / _____