

Asbestos in NSW

Communication toolkit

February 2024

Purpose of this toolkit

We have developed this toolkit to help you communicate important information about asbestos and the steps the NSW Government is taking.

Thank you for your support in sharing this important information with your communities, employees and networks.

How to use this toolkit

The toolkit contains information and easy to share resources including suggested text for newsletters which can be easily copied and pasted, a factsheet, media releases, and social content.

To download resources:

1. Click on the accompanying link which will take you to the nsw.gov.au website or Dropbox
2. For nsw.gov.au links, click 'Download as PDF' or 'Print this page'. For Dropbox, on the upper right-hand side you will see a 'Download' button
3. Click 'Download' or 'Save as PDF'.

Quick links to important information:



[Asbestos in NSW](#)



[EPA investigation](#)



[Submit an EPA investigation enquiry](#)



[Asbestos and health fact sheet](#)



[SafeWork NSW asbestos resources](#)

What is asbestos?

Asbestos is a natural mineral that was used in many building products before it was banned in Australia.

Asbestos fibres can pose a risk to health if they are airborne, as inhalation is the main way that asbestos enters the body.

Asbestos is common in homes and structures built before 1990 and was commonly used in:

- cement sheeting (fibro)
- drainage and flue pipes
- roofing, guttering and flexible building boards (eg Villaboard, Hardiflex, etc.). Similar cement sheeting products are used today, but are 'asbestos free'
- brakes, clutches and gaskets.

For more information, please visit the [Asbestos in NSW website](#).

NSW Asbestos Taskforce



The NSW Government is acting following the discovery of asbestos in mulch in some sites in NSW.

We have announced an Asbestos Taskforce to support the NSW Environment Protection Authority's (EPA's) investigation into asbestos in mulch.

The taskforce includes senior representatives from NSW Government agencies and local government. It will help co-ordinate government agencies and help prioritise sites that are highest risk to the public, to ensure all resources are available to secure and remediate sites.

The government's number one priority is "contact tracing" down the complex supply chain, and then facilitating testing, reporting and management of any positive results.

The EPA will provide daily updates on impacted sites.

For more information or to make an asbestos enquiry, please visit the [EPA website](#).

Asbestos and health



Living or working with asbestos, or just being around it, is low risk as long as the asbestos is in good condition and not disturbed. Asbestos occurs naturally and in the built environment. However, asbestos related illness in NSW is very uncommon.

Different forms of asbestos have different risk levels:

- **Bonded (non-friable) asbestos:** if asbestos is mixed with cement or other hard bonding materials, and in good condition, it is likely to be low-risk.
- **Friable asbestos:** can be crumbled, pulverised or reduced to a powder by hand pressure. If asbestos fibres then become airborne and breathed in, they can be a health risk. This is the most common way asbestos enters the body. The more fibres that are breathed in, the higher the risk.

If asbestos-containing materials are disturbed, fibres may be released into the air. Breathing in asbestos fibres can cause asbestosis, lung cancer and mesothelioma.

The risk of contracting these diseases increases with the number of fibres inhaled. The risk of lung cancer from inhaling asbestos fibres is also greater if you smoke.

People who get health problems from inhaling asbestos have usually been exposed to high levels of asbestos for a long time. The symptoms of these diseases do not usually appear until about 20 to 30 years after the first exposure to asbestos.

For more information on asbestos and health risks, please visit health.nsw.gov.au or [download a factsheet](#).

Asbestos in recycled mulch

Recycled mulch must not contain asbestos or any material likely to cause pollution. The EPA regularly audits producers and suppliers of recycled mulch and has a zero-tolerance approach to the presence of asbestos.

The EPA conducts regular compliance audits and campaigns, which can include unannounced inspections of resource recovery facilities. Businesses and individuals that allow any asbestos waste to be reused or recycled face significant penalties and can be fined up to \$2 million.

To mitigate health risks, the EPA has issued a Clean Up Notice to Transport for NSW for the removal of all mulch in the Rozelle Parklands and surrounds by 29 February 2024. The EPA has issued a Prevention Notice to the supplier of the mulch to ensure this product cannot be on sold while the investigation is continuing. This was followed up by the issue of a Clean-Up Notice, directing the supplier to notify all customers who received the identified mulch.

To understand the extent of the issue and protect the community, the EPA is investigating other sites that have received mulch from the same supplier.

What should a member of the public do if they believe they have received asbestos-contaminated mulch?

Members of the public and businesses who are concerned about contamination in mulch they have received or on sold should contact the EPA Environment Line on 131 555 or email info@epa.nsw.gov.au.

Parents and guardians who are concerned about asbestos-contaminated mulch on school sites should contact their school for further information and advice.

For more information, please visit the [EPA website](#).

SafeWork NSW asbestos information



If asbestos-containing material is in good condition it poses little health risk. However, when products containing asbestos are disturbed by cutting, drilling, water blasting or similar activities, small fibres may be released into the air.

You must always use a licensed asbestos professional to remove friable asbestos and when there is more than 10sqm of non-friable (bonded) asbestos.

However, due to the risks associated with disturbing asbestos, SafeWork NSW recommends you use a licensed asbestos professional to remove any amount of asbestos.

For more information for **asbestos workers** or on **asbestos in the workplace**, visit the [SafeWork NSW website](#).

Factsheet: Asbestos and health

[Click here to download factsheet](#)



Asbestos and health risks factsheet

Different forms of asbestos have different risk levels

About asbestos

Asbestos was commonly used in:

- cement sheeting (fibro)
- drainage and flue pipes
- roofing, guttering and flexible building boards (like Villaboard, Hardiflex).
- brakes, clutches and gaskets.

In the 1960s and 70s loose fibre asbestos was used in some parts of NSW as home roof insulation.

How can asbestos affect my health?

Breathing in asbestos fibres can cause asbestosis, lung cancer and mesothelioma. The risk of contracting these diseases increases with the number of fibres inhaled, and the risk of lung cancer from inhaling asbestos fibres is also greater if you smoke.

People who get health problems from inhaling asbestos have usually been exposed to high levels of asbestos for a long time. The symptoms of these diseases don't usually appear until about 20 to 30 years after the first exposure to asbestos.

When does asbestos pose a risk to health?

Asbestos fibres can pose a risk to health if airborne, as inhalation is the main way that asbestos enters the body. As asbestos occurs

naturally in some soils and was used historically in buildings, small quantities of asbestos fibres are normally present in the air, and are breathed by people without any ill effects. Most people are exposed to very small amounts of asbestos as they go about their daily lives and don't develop asbestos-related health problems.

People who have suffered health effects from exposure to asbestos have generally worked in either the asbestos mining or milling industry, worked in industries involved in making or installing asbestos products, or are from the immediate families of these people. In all of these situations there was exposure to high levels of airborne dust, from either the processes involved or from the clothes of the workers.

Different forms of asbestos have different risk levels

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- **Friable asbestos:** can be crumbled, pulverised or reduced to a powder by hand pressure. If asbestos fibres then become airborne and breathed in, they can be a health risk. This is the most common way asbestos enters the body. The more fibres that are breathed in, the higher the risk.

Media releases



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Penny Sharpe
Minister for Climate Change, Minister for Energy
Minister for the Environment, Minister for Heritage
Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council



Media Release
New Asbestos Taskforce to support investigation into mulch

Thursday, 15 February 2024

The NSW Government has today announced an Asbestos Taskforce to give more resources and support to the NSW Environment Protection Authority's investigation into asbestos in mulch.

The taskforce will be led by the current Chair of the NSW Asbestos Coordination Committee, Carolyn Walsh, and will include senior representatives of several NSW Government agencies, as well as local government.

The Premier and Minister for the Environment have activated an additional surge workforce to assist the state's environmental regulator, the NSW Environment Protection Authority (EPA), as the scale of the investigation continues to grow.

Additional staff from the Natural Resources Access Regulator and NSW Fire and Rescue will be deployed to the EPA to increase capacity. This is in addition to the EPA's already expanded workforce on the investigation.

The government's number one priority is "contact tracing" down the complex supply chain, and then facilitating testing, reporting and management of any positive results. SafeWork NSW, NSW Health and Public Works Advisory will continue to provide support.

The taskforce will help co-ordinate government agencies and assist in prioritising sites considered of highest risk to the public, to ensure all resources are available to secure and remediate sites.

It will also support the EPA in ensuring environmental risks to public land are appropriately managed, as the EPA prioritises its criminal investigation into any breaches of the law.

The taskforce will meet for the first time tomorrow.

The NSW Government is considering regulatory changes to strengthen both penalties and deterrence.

Quote attributable to the Minister for the Environment Penny Sharpe:

"The NSW Government is committed to ensuring the community is safe from any potential harmful impacts of contact with asbestos.

"This is the largest investigation the Environment Protection Authority has undertaken in recent decades. The complex, criminal investigation involves multiple lines of enquiry.

"Our number one priority is to finish contract tracing the supply chain – so that any potential receiver of the mulch is notified. That means we can take immediate action to make the area safe.


"The surge workforce means we can get to the bottom of the supply chain much faster.

"I am also taking advice on options to strengthen penalties for those who do the wrong thing."

MEDIA: Levi Joule | Minister Sharpe | 0481 112 074

52 Martin Place Sydney NSW 2000 GPO Box 5341 Sydney NSW 2001
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EPA to conduct priority testing at Sydney schools

15 February 2024

Through the NSW Environment Protection Authority (EPA) supply chain tracking, seven schools have been identified for precautionary testing, with inspections commencing last night and today.

There is currently no evidence of asbestos contamination at any of the schools identified. The EPA is providing this advice ahead of testing to keep the school community across developments so they can advise parents and keep school communities safe.

This is precautionary testing only. Schools have made individual risk assessments based on the amount of mulch on site, with the majority remaining open and one school choosing to close.

Those that remain open are advised to keep students and staff away from garden beds in and around the school sites, and to expect to see EPA officers on the ground throughout the day.

This decision was supported by the NSW Government Asbestos Taskforce, which includes representatives from NSW Health and the Department of Education.

To date, around 90 per cent of tested sites have returned a negative or clean result. Twenty-four sites have returned a positive result for bonded asbestos, which NSW Health advises is low risk to public health, and one site for friable asbestos.

These schools have been identified as having received mulch from the same manufacturer that has supplied mulch to the 25 other sites.

Inspections will be taking place at:

- Allambie Heights Public School in Allambie Heights
- International Grammar School in Ultimo
- Mt Annan Christian College in Mt Annan
- North Sydney Public School in North Sydney
- Penrith Christian School in Orchard Hills
- St Luke's Catholic College in Marsden Park – *Closed today.*
- Westmead Christian Grammar in Westmead

Once results are finalised, the EPA will advise what further action may be required. We encourage parents with concerns about mulch in their child's school, to contact the school directly for the most up to date information.

Social content

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Post: An Asbestos Taskforce has been set up to support the NSW Environment Protection Authority's investigation into asbestos in mulch. For more information, please visit the [EPA website](#)

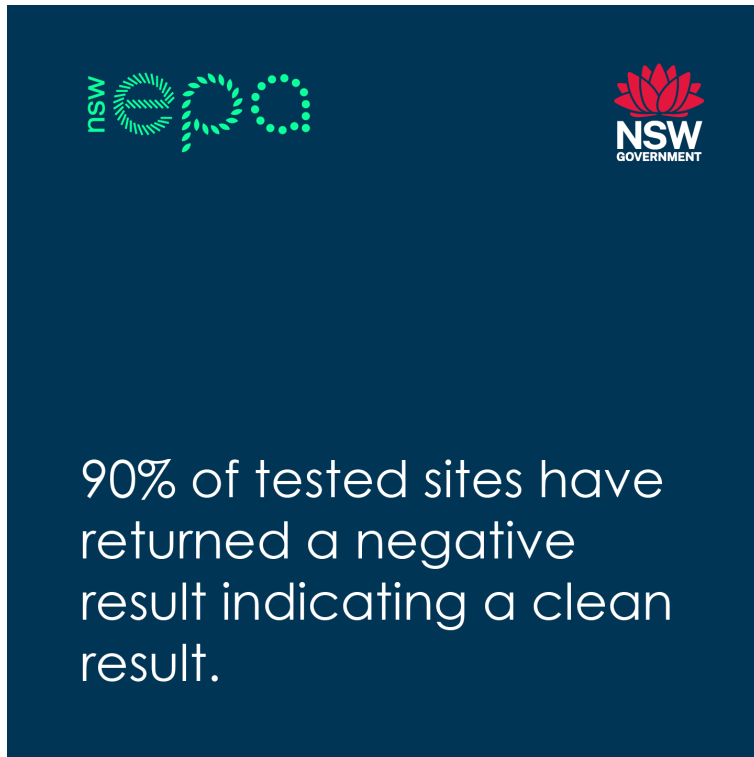
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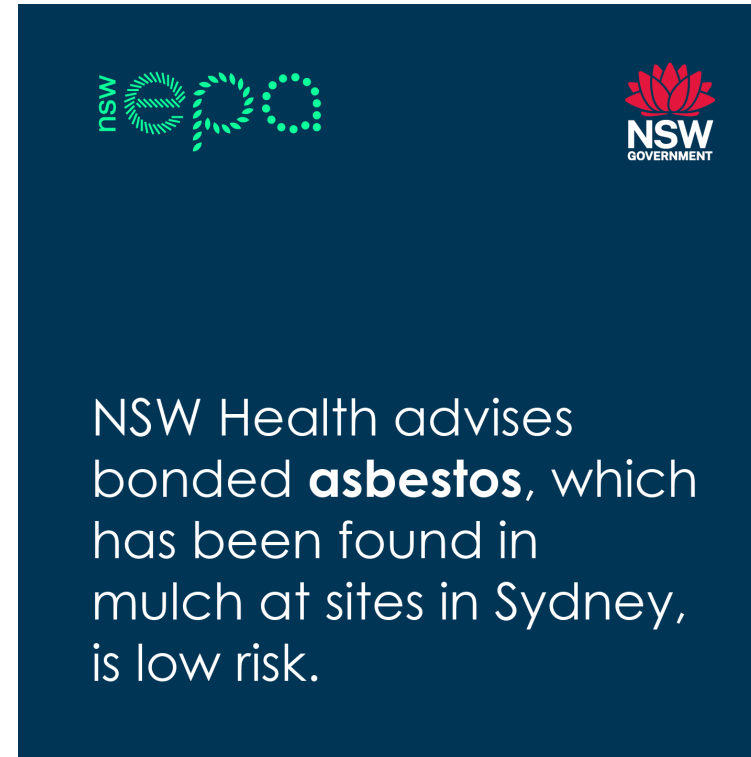
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