

POSITION STATEMENT

ASBESTOS CLEARANCE PROCEDURES

This position statement is for

- > employers, employees, self-employed, principals, contractors, subcontractors and people in control of a place of work that contains asbestos
- > International Accreditation New Zealand (IANZ)-accredited laboratories involved in testing asbestos fibres
- > people and organisations conducting asbestos testing.

Applicable industries or workplaces

- > all industries involved in asbestos removal in New Zealand
- > all workplaces where asbestos removal may take place (including where the workplace is a residential home) in New Zealand.

Purpose of position statement

This document clarifies WorkSafe New Zealand's position on clearance procedures when asbestos removal work has taken place.

Following the guidance in this position statement is not compulsory. People responsible for workplace health and safety can take other steps to comply with the law if those steps are equal to, or better than, those outlined in this document.

ISSUE: ASBESTOS EXPOSURE FROM POOR CLEARANCE PROCEDURES

Concerns have been raised whether people in charge of worksites containing asbestos are using appropriate clearance procedures after removing asbestos-contaminated materials (ACM). The concerns are:

- People misinterpret 'reoccupation' as 'habitation,' and do not conduct clearance testing before people re-enter areas or buildings for either short or long durations.
- Inadequate asbestos removal could result in people being exposed to airborne asbestos fibres when they reoccupy areas or buildings.
- People handling demolition waste from areas or buildings that had ACM might be exposed to asbestos fibres.
- Sites become contaminated when areas or buildings that previously contained asbestos are demolished.

The safety of people close to asbestos-contaminated sites

On asbestos-contaminated sites, asbestos can be disturbed or crushed, releasing asbestos fibres into the air. This puts workers and people near the worksite at risk of asbestos-related diseases.

¹ 'Reoccupation' includes people entering the area or building for short durations, for example, preparing the building or area for demolition. It is not restricted to 'habitation' or long-term occupation.

SOLUTION

WorkSafe's position is that clearance sampling should be conducted after all friable asbestos removal work. The person conducting the sampling may recommend a final swab sample and test before issuing the clearance certificate. The person doing the clearance sampling should be independent of the asbestos removal contractor.

Removing asbestos using enclosures:

After using enclosures and before clearing the area for re-occupancy, conduct a four-stage clearance.

The four-stage clearance is:

1. Visually inspect the surfaces within the enclosure.
2. Apply sealant if it is reasonably practicable.
3. Conduct static air clearance monitoring² with dust disturbance inside the enclosure.
4. After successful air monitoring and dismantling the enclosure for removal, conduct a final visual check to ensure the area is clean.

Once the person conducting the clearance test is satisfied the area is safe for reoccupation, they should issue a certificate stating this, and include the test results.

Removing asbestos without using enclosures:

When removing asbestos without using enclosures, clearance testing should involve a visual inspection conducted by a competent person.

This person may require air monitoring, surface swabs or tape sampling before issuing a clearance certificate.

This also applies to areas or buildings that are going to be demolished, to ensure the demolition waste is not contaminated with asbestos.

LEGAL OBLIGATIONS WHEN WORKING WITH ASBESTOS

The law³ requires people working with asbestos to do certain things to make sure they, and other people around them are not harmed by asbestos, including:

- > conducting tests to determine if asbestos is present
- > doing work involving asbestos in accordance with the Regulations
- > remediating asbestos where it is present
- > after completing work, conducting clearance testing to ensure the place is safe for reoccupation.

ISSUED: NOVEMBER 2014. VERSION: 2

² Static monitoring involves positioning monitors at fixed points in the area undergoing sampling.

³ Health and Safety in Employment Act 1992 and Health and Safety in Employment (Asbestos) Regulations 1998