

Asbestos Exposure Following Flooding - Event 98/2223 2022_56 WHS

Summary of the issue

As we continue to support communities across NSW we wish to remind you about the dangers of Asbestos. Asbestos can be found in buildings built prior to 1987. It was commonly used in flat or corrugated sheets (fibro) for walls, ceilings, the backing of vinyl floor coverings or roofing. Flood waters cause property damage and the risk of asbestos containing materials being disturbed is high. Damage to buildings, homes and materials may include waterlogging, holes, cracks and breakages. This may result in the potential release of asbestos fibres.



Nature of the hazard

Asbestos is not normally harmful unless disturbed. Flood waters can damage the integrity of buildings, exposing asbestos fibres.

When asbestos containing materials are subjected to floods or storms, the bonding material – mainly cement – breaks down and allows asbestos fibres to be released into the atmosphere. This is known as friable and is dangerous.

When asbestos sheeting has been penetrated or broken, this can release asbestos fibres where they can be loose in the air, contaminate waters and subsequently be ingested or inhaled.

Some asbestos fibres are waterproof, allowing them to sit on the surface of water and risk being inhaled, which can cause long term damage to the lungs.

Action now required

- NSW SES members are not qualified Asbestos Removalists and are not to engage in the removal or sample collection of suspected asbestos material.
- Ensure Take 5 risk [assessment](#) is conducted to identify any hazards at the locations teams are working at.
- If you suspect an asbestos hazard in a public or private space, isolate the area, remove yourself and any other person from direct contact. Notify your Team Leader/Controller immediately to allow escalation to obtain advice on management of potential contamination, such as contacting Hazmat.

- Hazmat does not need to be called to private residences, as an owner of dwellings containing asbestos must have the house/building assessed by a licensed asbestos assessor or qualified contractor for remediation and/or removal.
- Ensure appropriate PPE/PPC is being worn to undertake activities, long sleeve shirts, and long pants, including footwear. A P2 face mask should be worn prior to entering any roof space OR when undertaking a Take 5 in instances where there is a likelihood of asbestos being present.
- If you suspect that your clothing has come into contact with asbestos, remove all clothing at the scene, bag and rinse down boots to remove any contaminants. Report to your Team Leader to arrange handling of contaminated clothing.
- Report all incidents via 1800 SES OH (1800 737 647)

Contact for more information

Enquiries regarding this Safety Bulletin should be directed to the WHS Team at whs@ses.nsw.gov.au with additional information available on the [SafeWork Fact Sheet](#) or [website](#)

Authorised by:

Dean Storey – State Duty Commander – 20/11/22