



COMMUNITY HOUSING LTD
GROUP OF COMPANIES

FACT SHEET 13

ASBESTOS

What exactly is asbestos?

Asbestos is a mineral fibre. In the past, asbestos was mixed with cement to make it stronger and easier to mould into different shapes and sizes, such as fibro sheeting. Asbestos was also popular because of its fire resistance and insulation qualities.

Is asbestos dangerous?

Asbestos in fibro sheeting can present a health risk if the sheeting is cut or sanded, causing the physical release of the asbestos fibres.

This material is considered safe if it is left undisturbed and is in good condition. Asbestos fibres, when inhaled, can cause asbestosis, lung cancer and mesothelioma. The risk of contracting these conditions increases as the amount of asbestos fibres inhaled increases.

People who get health problems from inhaling asbestos have usually been exposed to high levels of asbestos over a very long period of time, such as people who have worked in asbestos mines or who have been employed in the production of fibro sheeting.

Is it still used to build or repair Community Housing Limited homes?

No. Since 1986, asbestos has been banned for use in building products in WA. Fibro sheeting that may contain asbestos is still present in many homes, built before 1986. It was usually used as wall cladding, in eaves and in wet areas such as bathrooms and laundries. Work Cover WA recommend that all houses built prior to 31st December 2003 should be presumed to have asbestos in case second hand material was used in any construction.

Modern fibrous cement sheeting uses cellulose fibres instead of asbestos fibres and is considered a safe building material.

Am I in any danger?

The long-term risks of living in a home which contains asbestos products is extremely small relative to other risks experienced in everyday lives.

It is very important to realise that there are very low levels of asbestos in the air that we breathe while going about our day-to-day lives.

What do I do if I suspect there is asbestos material in a home?

A significant number of the homes built before 1986 could contain some form of asbestos cement, irrespective if they are public housing or privately owned homes.

If you think asbestos may be in your home, don't panic! If asbestos material is in good condition, and is left alone, it is harmless. Generally, material in good condition will not release asbestos fibres. There is no danger unless fibres are released and inhaled into the lungs. If the area you suspect has asbestos in it starts to show signs of wear or damage, such as tears or abrasions, contact Community Housing Limited and report it.

A contractor will then come to your home as soon as possible and inspect the area, and possibly take a sample. If material contains asbestos, Community Housing Limited will ensure it is either rendered safe or removed.

The residential tenancy agreement signed by you at the beginning of your tenancy states that you are not to alter your home in any way without the permission of Community Housing Limited. This includes cutting into walls, drilling holes, making repairs and so forth.

If you inform Community Housing Limited that you are seeking permission to do work on your home that might include disturbing fibro sheeting, Community Housing Limited will ensure your home is inspected and tested where required.

What do I do if I think I have been exposed to asbestos dust?

Don't panic. The first thing is to make sure you are not exposed to any more dust. Call the Community Housing Limited immediately. If you are worried that you have inhaled dust that may contain asbestos, it may be advisable to see your doctor for peace of mind.

Any Questions

If you have any questions about the information in this Fact Sheet or on any other housing related matter, please contact your nearest Community Housing Limited Office or visit our website

www.chl.org.au



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What should I do if I or someone else accidentally has created a hole in some fibro sheeting?

Make sure everyone at your home stays clear of the area and contact Community Housing Limited on 1300 4 CHL Repair. A contractor will come around as soon as possible and make sure the area is safe, and may take a sample for testing.

Remember, your safety comes first. Any matters as to who should pay for the repairs if you, your children or a friend has caused the hole can be dealt with at a later date.

Are contractors trained to deal with asbestos?

All of Community Housing Limited's contractors must abide by WorkCover WA regulations when they handle or move asbestos matter. This means they must be licensed to work with asbestos. If you suspect your contractor is not licensed, or has incorrectly disposed of asbestos matter, please contact Community Housing Limited.

Can I transfer out of my home because I think it has asbestos?

No. Community Housing Limited, on the best advice from WA Health and WorkCover WA, considers fibro sheeting safe if it is left unharmed.

I have been drilling holes in my walls to hang pictures. Should I do this?

No. While the possibility of this having any effect on your health is minimal, the slight chance still exists. Please contact Community Housing Limited on 1300 4 CHL Repair before drilling holes in cement sheeting.

If I find cement sheeting lying on the ground or under my house, what should I do?

Don't touch it. Report it to Community Housing Limited, who will organise it to be removed by qualified asbestos handlers.

What do I do if an older house with fibro is being demolished next door?

WorkCover and WA Health say that living next door to a house with fibro is only a problem when the fibro sheeting is broken or disturbed.

There are some things that neighbours can do to minimise any risk during demolition works.

You can

- ask the contractor how long the demolition will take
- note the phone number of the foreman in charge of the demolition and call him if there are any problems
- close your windows and doors that face the property being demolished to prevent dust getting in
- check that the property is securely fenced to prevent access by the public
- make sure that all asbestos cement is removed from the demolished site.



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