

## FACT SHEET 2: Exposure to asbestos from bushfire affected areas

Generally, buildings built before 1990 contain asbestos. Asbestos is typically found in roofs and walls, sheds, vinyl floor tiles and wet areas such as bathrooms and laundries.

These asbestos-containing materials are normally regarded as 'non-friable'. However, as a result of being involved in a fire some may become 'friable' so that asbestos fibres from these materials are more easily released into the air once the material is disturbed.

***Take the following precautions to protect employees whose work may require them to directly disturb housing material that may contain asbestos, and employees that are working in the vicinity of asbestos-contaminated areas.***

### **1. Direct disturbance of damaged/destroyed housing material that may contain asbestos:**

- Carry out work in a manner that prevents the release of airborne asbestos fibres as far as reasonably practicable (e.g. wet down the material prior to disturbing it with a fine water mist spray to keep it damp).
- Do not use excessive water as this may spread contamination
- Wear Australian Standard approved respiratory protective equipment and disposable coveralls (ensure you are clean shaven if wearing a tight fitting respirator)
- Restrict access to only those necessary for the required work
- Personal decontamination should take place in an area isolated from others at the end of the work period – the form this takes may vary but as a minimum should include:
  - spraying a fine water mist spray on disposable overalls
  - carefully peeling overalls off by rolling them down your body
  - placing the overalls in a waste bag
  - wiping your hands and face with a damp cloth then disposing of the cloth as waste
  - removing the respirator and disposing of disposable respirators as waste (non-disposable respirators should be wiped and stored with the wipe being disposed of as waste)
- Any equipment used should be decontaminated by wet wiping, unless it cannot be appropriately decontaminated – if this is the case it should be disposed of as waste. Wet wiping of such equipment should be done while wearing overalls and respirator
- Waste should be disposed of in accordance with EPA requirements

### **2. Working in areas with potential exposure to airborne asbestos fibres:**

- Determine whether there is potential for airborne asbestos fibres in the work area
- If there is such potential, as a minimum, Australian Standard approved respiratory protective equipment should be worn (e.g. a disposable P1 or P2 respirator)
- Where there is potential for visible dust/debris to contaminate your clothing while performing the required task, refer to recommendations for direct disturbance of asbestos containing materials

***For general advice contact WorkSafe Advisory Service on 1800 136 089.***