

Issue 15 of 2019 – 30 July

SAFework NSW – POSITION PAPER CLADDING OVER ASBESTOS CONTAINING MATERIALS

Members are advised that SafeWork NSW has published the final version of its Position Paper on Cladding Over Asbestos Containing Materials.

The key message arising from the Position Paper is that “whether you are a homeowner or business, where asbestos is present, a licensed asbestos removalist should be engaged to remove the asbestos containing material prior to cladding.”

The Position Paper: Cladding Over Asbestos Containing Materials follows.

This alert and others, can be viewed on the [SafeWork NSW website](#).



Position paper: over cladding asbestos containing materials

This position paper relates to a popular trend within the residential sector where asbestos cement sheeting is being clad over with new non-asbestos products. This practice is causing considerable damage to the asbestos containing material (ACM), risk to asbestos exposure and subsequent clean-up costs.

To control risks from ACM, it is the SafeWork NSW position, that whether you are a homeowner or a person conducting a business or undertaking (PCBU), where asbestos is present, a licensed asbestos removalist should be engaged to remove the ACM prior to cladding.

Where ACM has been removed and a flat surface is required to install new cladding, a non-asbestos containing material must be used.

The removal of ACM prior to cladding eliminates the risk of inhalation of asbestos fibres caused by any future breakage or refurbishment of the exterior of the property. After the ACM is removed by a licensed asbestos removalist, a clearance certificate will be issued by an independent competent person giving the home/building owner's peace of mind that the asbestos containing material has been removed appropriately.

Background

SafeWork NSW Inspectors have observed that only the asbestos cover strips are being removed from the external asbestos wall sheeting of houses to provide a flat surface to install the new cladding material. The removal of these strips using pinch bars or similar tools and nailing new non-asbestos cladding into the existing asbestos containing material causes breakage and contamination of the ground and wall cavities where work is being undertaken.

Risks of over-cladding ACM

Over-cladding ACM creates a risk of:

- Breakage of ACM leading to asbestos contamination (both by removing the timber connecting strips and nailing in new non-asbestos cladding)
- Asbestos containing material being hidden from view creating potential for disturbance during future refurbishment works.
- Significant health risks may arise from the inhalation of airborne asbestos fibres. If ACM is in a stable material (such as fibro) and is in good condition, it poses little health risk. However,

where fibro is broken, damaged or disturbed, it can release airborne fibres which may lead to asbestos related diseases include asbestosis, lung cancer and mesothelioma.

PCBU obligations under the WHS Regulation 2017

[The Work Health and Safety Regulation 2017](#) places several obligations on persons conducting a business or undertaking (PCBU) in relation to demolition or refurbishment on a structure.

Clause 457 – Refurbishment of residential premises. It states that a PCBU who is to carry out refurbishment of residential premises must ensure: (a) that all asbestos that is likely to be disturbed is identified, and (b) so far as is reasonably practicable, that the asbestos is removed before the refurbishment is commenced.

The Work Health and Safety Act 2011 (Section 18) defines “[reasonably practicable](#)”. SafeWork NSW position is that it is “reasonably practicable” to remove ACM prior to refurbishment on most occasions. The removal of over 10 square meters of non-friable asbestos must be undertaken by a licensed asbestos removalist. A list of licensed asbestos removalists can be found at <https://www.safework.nsw.gov.au/asbestos-and-demolition-licence-holders>

Where it is not “reasonably practicable” to remove the ACM prior to refurbishment the PCBU must comply with all regulations as outlined in Chapter 8 of the Work Health and Safety Regulation 2017 including:

- a) Ensuring staff have undertaken asbestos awareness training (identification, safe handling of, and suitable control measures for, asbestos and ACM)
- b) Ensuring staff have undertaken health monitoring if the work is ongoing,
- c) Not using, or directing or allowing a worker to use any of the following equipment on asbestos or ACM unless to use of the equipment is controlled
 - a. Power tools,
 - b. Brooms
 - c. Any other implements that cause the release of airborne asbestos into the atmosphere

Images of issues associated with over cladding



Figure 1: *Damage caused to asbestos sheeting when removing connecting strips*



Figure 2: *Asbestos contamination on the ground*



Figure 3: Damage to ACM sheeting in preparation for cladding

More information

Please call SafeWork NSW on 13 10 50 or dial 1800ASBESTOS.