

Statewide Strategic Plan for the Safe Management of Asbestos in Queensland 2014–2019



Foreword



The Statewide Strategic Plan for the Safe Management of Asbestos in Queensland 2014-2019 is a key government initiative to protect the Queensland community from risks associated with exposure to asbestos fibres.

The Queensland Government is committed to improving asbestos safety and will continue to work with local governments, industry, workers, organisations advocating asbestos safety and the wider community to achieve this.

The Queensland Government supports a coordinated whole-of-government approach towards the management of asbestos. This plan provides an integrated and strategic direction for the regulation and management of asbestos in Queensland and outlines the following priority areas:

- minimising the risk of exposure to asbestos
- seamless and integrated government service delivery
- community education and awareness about asbestos.

Asbestos-related diseases affect thousands of Australians. We must continue to work together to ensure people are aware of the risks arising from exposure to asbestos and know how to reduce those risks.

The Honourable Jarrod Bleijie MP
Attorney-General and Minister for Justice

More information

The Queensland Government website at asbestos.qld.gov.au provides information on asbestos.

The Smart Services Qld 13 QGOV number (telephone number 13 74 68) provides a single point of contact for the public on asbestos-related matters.

Introduction

The Queensland Government has a comprehensive regulatory framework to minimise the risks of exposure to asbestos in workplaces, domestic premises and the natural environment. These laws are administered by four state government departments and 73 local councils. Other state government agencies are also involved in the management of asbestos or responding to asbestos-related incidents.

The Queensland Government is committed to improving asbestos safety and supports a coordinated whole-of-government approach towards the management and regulation of asbestos.

Workplace Health and Safety Queensland (WHSQ) in the Department of Justice and Attorney-General (DJAG) is the lead agency for the strategic coordination of asbestos regulation and management and, where necessary, incident response.

WHSQ has developed the *Statewide Strategic Plan for the Safe Management of Asbestos in Queensland 2014-2019* in collaboration with other government departments with asbestos-related responsibilities and representatives of local councils.

This plan focuses on the following priority areas:

- minimising the risk of exposure to asbestos
- seamless and integrated government service delivery
- community education and awareness about asbestos.

Where there is alignment, initiatives in this plan will complement or link with the *National Strategic Plan for Asbestos Awareness and Management 2013-2018*.

Aim

The aim of this plan is to provide a strategic and coordinated approach to the regulation and management of asbestos in Queensland to minimise the risk of exposure to asbestos fibres at workplaces, domestic premises and in the natural environment.

About asbestos

Asbestos was mined and manufactured into a wide range of asbestos containing materials which were commonly used in residential, commercial and industrial buildings and structures between the 1940s and late 1980s. Phasing out of asbestos containing materials in construction began in the mid-1980s and as a result, building materials made after 1990 are unlikely to contain asbestos. The use of all forms of asbestos was banned nationally from 31 December 2003.

In Queensland, asbestos containing materials were used extensively in construction due to its relatively low cost and suitability to the Queensland climate. Examples of products containing asbestos include asbestos cement sheeting, asbestos cement pipes and gutters, asbestos backed vinyl flooring, gaskets and insulation material used in fire doors.

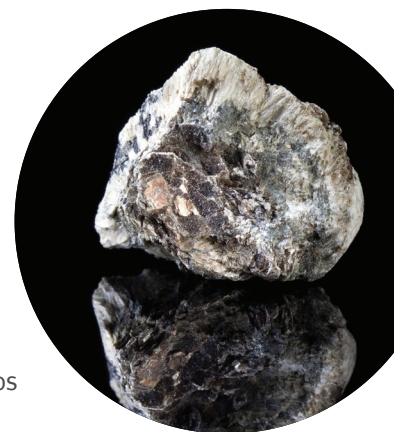


Image: Chrysotile, used in asbestos manufacturing



Health risks from exposure to asbestos

Asbestos is a known carcinogen. Asbestos can pose a health risk when fibres of a respirable size become airborne, are inhaled in sufficient concentration, and reach deep into the lungs in sufficient quantities. The possible health effects of asbestos include:

- asbestosis
- lung cancer
- mesothelioma
- benign pleural disease.

Asbestos-related diseases usually take many years to develop. The risk of developing an asbestos-related disease increases in proportion to the number of asbestos fibres breathed in over a lifetime.

The belief that ‘one fibre can kill’ is not supported by scientific evidence. Asbestos is widespread in the environment at very low levels due to asbestos fibre release from natural sources and extensive industrial and commercial use of asbestos in the past. The burden of asbestos fibres in the lungs appears to be well tolerated in most people, which is contrary to the belief that one fibre kills. In studies of lungs of people aged 60 to 79 years who had not died from asbestos-related disease, up to one million fibres per gram of dry lung tissue were measured.

The belief that one fibre can kill underpins fear and anxiety about asbestos exposure. Except in cases of high occupational exposure, the incidence of asbestos-related disease is very low. Occasional exposures to low concentrations of asbestos fibres, for example from house fires or renovation work on a neighbouring property, are likely to be associated with very low or negligible health risks.

Due to its widespread use in the past, asbestos containing materials still exist in many buildings and other places. Where the asbestos containing material is broken or disturbed, fibres can become loose and airborne and create a risk to health.

In the past, occupational exposure to asbestos fibres usually occurred while people were mining asbestos, manufacturing asbestos containing products or working with those products in industries such as construction, power generation and water treatment.

Currently, potential exposure to risk from asbestos fibres is mainly through the maintenance, removal, renovation and demolition of commercial buildings and residential homes where asbestos containing materials were installed before 1990. As a consequence, a broad range of trade-based occupations may now be potentially exposed to risk from asbestos fibres if removal or disturbance of the asbestos is not carried out safely.

It is anticipated that in the short to medium term, this trend in the risk of exposure to asbestos will continue and include home owners and their families as a result of do-it-yourself home renovations.

Managing the risk of exposure

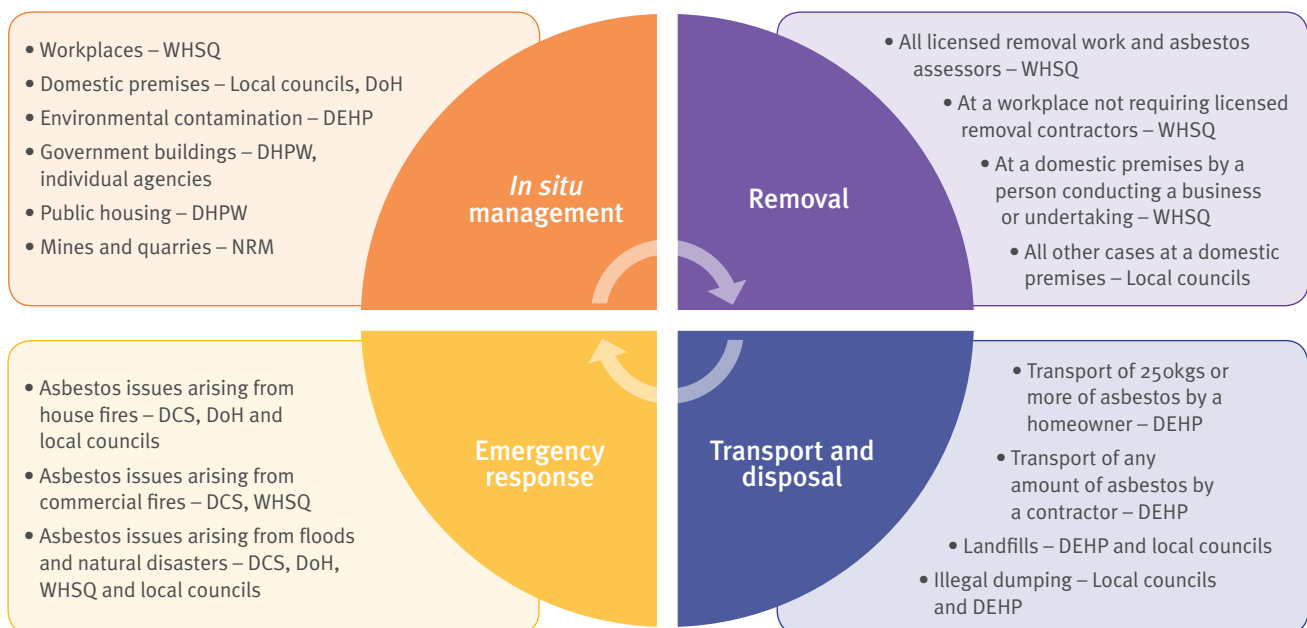
Exposure to asbestos fibres can occur when existing asbestos containing materials are disturbed. This type of exposure can arise from unsafe removal techniques, maintenance or renovation type work (such as drilling and surface preparation) where poor or inadequate controls are in place to prevent the release of asbestos fibres.

Where the asbestos containing material is in good condition and left undisturbed, it is unlikely that significant concentrations of asbestos fibres will be released into the air and the risk to health is extremely low. Removal of asbestos containing material from homes and workplaces should only occur if the material is in poor condition, likely to sustain damage or during renovations. Work health and safety legislation has requirements about removing asbestos containing material before contractors carry out demolition or refurbishment work.

Asbestos removal must be carried out safely by people with appropriate training, supervision, equipment and, in some circumstances, with the relevant asbestos removal licence or certificate. A removal licence is not required

where a person is removing 10m² or less of non-friable asbestos containing material at a workplace, however safety precautions still need to be taken to minimise the release of asbestos fibres.

Roles and responsibilities of state government departments and local councils in relation to the regulation and management of asbestos in Queensland



There are four state government departments and 73 local councils with legislative responsibilities for asbestos:

- work health and safety legislation** regulates the management, control and removal of asbestos in the workplace (including residential premises which are a ‘workplace’ when work is undertaken by a contractor). WHSQ in DJAG administers this legislation. In the case of workplaces that are mining leases, asbestos standards are administered by the

Department of Natural Resources and Mines.

- public health legislation** applies to asbestos-related activities carried out at non-workplaces settings (i.e. by home owners at domestic premises). This legislation is administered by the Department of Health (DoH) with the responsibility devolved to local councils.

- **environmental protection and waste legislation** regulates the transportation of commercial and industrial waste; the licensing of disposal facilities (such as landfills); and notification and remediation of contaminated land. The Department of Environment and Heritage Protection (DEHP) administers this legislation, with some powers delegated or devolved to local councils.
- **mining and quarrying legislation** regulates the risks posed by naturally occurring asbestos that may be exposed during mining processes within the mining and quarrying industries and asbestos materials installed in buildings and plant on mine sites. This legislation is administered by the Department of Natural Resources and Mines (DNRM).

The following table summarises Queensland's asbestos-related legislation and the responsible agencies.

Responsibility	Legislation
Workplace Health and Safety Queensland, Department of Justice and Attorney-General	<i>Work Health and Safety Act 2011</i>
	<i>Work Health and Safety Regulation 2011</i>
Department of Health and local councils	<i>Public Health Act 2005</i>
	<i>Public Health Regulation 2005</i>
Department of Environment and Heritage Protection (with some powers delegated to local councils)	<i>Environmental Protection Act 1994</i>
	<i>Environmental Protection Regulation 2008</i>
	<i>Environmental Protection (Waste Management) Regulation 2000</i>
	<i>Waste Reduction and Recycling Act 2011</i>
Department of Natural Resources and Mines	<i>Mining and Quarrying Safety and Health Act 1999</i>
	<i>Coal Mining Safety and Health Act 1999</i>
	<i>Mining and Quarrying Safety and Health Regulation 2001</i>
	<i>Coal Mining Safety and Health Regulation 2001</i>



Implementing the plan

WHSQ will take the lead in providing strategic oversight for the implementation of this plan to ensure the safe management of asbestos issues in Queensland, including interagency cooperation on operational asbestos issues and identifying the lead response agency when particular asbestos-related incidents occur. However, departments and local councils will remain responsible for carrying out their regulatory functions and operational activities for public health, work health and safety and environmental protection.

WHSQ will be supported by the Interagency Asbestos Group (IAG). The purpose of the IAG is to work cooperatively to achieve a coordinated and systematic approach to the management of asbestos in Queensland.

The IAG is chaired by the Deputy Director-General, Office of Fair and Safe Work Queensland, DJAG. It consists of senior representatives from the following agencies with a role in the regulation, enforcement and/or management of asbestos in Queensland:

- Workplace Health and Safety Queensland, DJAG
- Department of Health
- Department of Natural Resources and Mines
- Department of Environment and Heritage Protection
- Department of Housing and Public Works
- Department of Premier and Cabinet
- Local Government Association of Queensland

Priority areas for action

The aim of this plan is to provide a strategic and coordinated approach to the regulation and management of asbestos in Queensland to minimise the risk of exposure to asbestos fibres at workplaces, residential premises and in the natural environment. Three priority areas have been identified to achieve this aim.

1. Minimising the risk of exposure to asbestos

This priority aims to ensure there are robust and effective regulatory controls for asbestos throughout its life cycle. It also aims to ensure there are adequate regulatory tools available to enforce compliance with asbestos laws.

2. Seamless and integrated government service delivery

This priority aims to ensure there is effective coordination, cooperation and communication between the government agencies managing each part of the asbestos life cycle, and clarity about each agency's responsibilities. It also aims to provide an effective framework to deal with complex incidents and natural disasters that may require the attention and resources of a number of agencies.

3. Community education and awareness about asbestos

This priority aims to ensure there is accurate, clear and consistent information for the community about asbestos, its associated health risks and how to minimise exposure to risk. This will be achieved by working with a range of community and stakeholder groups to improve education and awareness about asbestos.

Priority 1

Minimising the risk of exposure to asbestos			
Goal	Initiative	Responsibility	Timeframe
Ensuring a robust and effective licensing regime	1. Review the effectiveness of the licensing framework in the national model work health and safety laws.	WHSQ	December 2015
	2. Continue to strengthen the administration of asbestos licensing under work health and safety laws including a process for suspending or cancelling an asbestos licence where a licence holder contravenes the legislation.	WHSQ	June 2014
	3. Create a public online register of WHS asbestos licence holders where the public can easily check licensing and compliance records of contractors who work with asbestos.	WHSQ	June 2014
	4. Review the current regime for the transport and disposal of asbestos by contractors and homeowners to determine whether it is a disincentive to the proper disposal of asbestos waste.	DEHP	July 2015
	5. Monitor the effectiveness of the homeowner certification process to remove more than 10m ² of non-friable asbestos from a dwelling and to strengthen compliance.	DoH	September 2015
Ensure compliance and control of risks	6. Carry out targeted and coordinated compliance programs to ensure compliance with asbestos laws.	WHSQ, DEHP, DoH	Ongoing
	7. Review the suitability of existing fines and enforcement tools available to WHS inspectors to deal with asbestos in workplaces.	WHSQ	September 2015
	8. Review and take steps to address the adequacy of enforcement tools available under the Public Health Act and any factors impeding the ability to take enforcement action under the Public Health Act.	DoH	September 2015
	9. Develop and maintain the capacity of WHS inspectors and council officers to ensure they have a high level of skills, knowledge and confidence to deal with asbestos matters.	Agencies with enforcement responsibilities	Ongoing
	10. Develop and communicate an agreed government position on the health risks associated with asbestos and asbestos containing material, including the risk posed by low density board.	IAG	September 2014
Reducing illegal dumping	11. Work with local councils to ensure there are adequate facilities in each local government area to enable homeowners and contractors to dispose of asbestos waste safely and lawfully.	IAG	Ongoing
	12. Publish a register of sites in Queensland that accept asbestos waste.	IAG	May 2014

Priority 2

Seamless and integrated service delivery			
Goal	Initiative	Responsibility	Timeframe
Clear roles and responsibilities of agencies	13. Develop a protocol with local councils to assign responsibility for managing the response, clean-up and costs of asbestos incidents where the responsible party is not immediately identifiable or is unable or unwilling to carry out the necessary clean-up activities.	WHSQ, DoH, DEHP, local councils	July 2015
	14. Develop and provide clear advice to all relevant WHSQ and DoH officers about the precise limits of each agency's jurisdiction in relation to the management and enforcement of asbestos.	WHSQ, DoH	July 2014
	15. Reach agreement on which agency has responsibility for clearing up illegal dumping in specific situations and develop a formal mechanism for passing information between agencies about possible illegal dumping or improper transport of asbestos.	IAG	June 2015
Effective ways to deal with complex incidents and natural disasters	16. Finalise the multiagency asbestos incident response protocol and provide clear guidance to all relevant agencies on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • which agency has primary responsibility for responding to asbestos issues relating to incidents and natural disasters • how agencies will coordinate their response efforts • particular issues of confusion that may arise regarding the jurisdiction of agencies. 	IAG	June 2014
	17. Ensure there are mechanisms within local disaster management plans to identify responsibility for asbestos issues and communication with the public about asbestos risks during natural disasters.	IAG	June 2014

Priority 3

Community education and awareness about asbestos

Targeted area	Initiatives	Responsibility	Timeframe
Improved community access to information	18. Provide information about asbestos to local councils to ensure their websites have accurate, consistent and comprehensive information.	IAG, local councils	December 2014
	19. Develop accurate, consistent and comprehensive information to clearly explain each agency's role and legislation in relation to asbestos and provide this on the single portal asbestos website.	IAG with all other agencies	June 2014
	20. Enhance the new whole-of-government single portal website for asbestos until it becomes the primary site for access to information on asbestos issues for the public and the asbestos removal industry in Queensland.	IAG with all other agencies	September 2014
Improved public awareness of asbestos related matters	21. Develop a whole-of-government communication strategy that uses identifiable 'trigger points' to communicate information about asbestos before exposure to asbestos occurs. The strategy will include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • promoting the single portal asbestos website and hotline to relevant agencies, stakeholders and the public • working with agencies and local councils to ensure the website and hotline are advertised on all agency and council websites relating to asbestos. • clear linkages to agency-specific communication strategies and asbestos plans • publishing information on high priority areas - natural disasters, house fires, demolition, removal, maintenance, renovations • developing mechanisms/processes to provide information at appropriate 'trigger points' when people are likely to encounter asbestos. 	IAG	December 2014
	22. Develop a suite of safe work procedures to demonstrate how asbestos can be safely managed for certain high risk tasks.	WHSQ	Ongoing
	23. Undertake coordinated awareness campaigns for high priority groups including removalists, tradespeople, renovators, rental property tenants and owner builders.	IAG with participation by agencies relevant to target audience	Ongoing
	24. Collaborate with relevant bodies and community organisations to identify further ways to increase awareness of asbestos safety in Queensland.	IAG	Ongoing
	25. Increase awareness in the asbestos industry about the requirement to hold both a regulated waste transport licence and a waste transport certificate for transporting asbestos.	DEHP	Ongoing
	26. Work with remote, discrete Indigenous communities to facilitate awareness about asbestos issues through the established forum of technical working groups.	DATSIMA and other agencies as required	Ongoing

Reporting and evaluation

The *Statewide Strategic Plan for the Safe Management of Asbestos in Queensland 2014-2019* is a five year plan. The initiatives in this plan are intended to protect the long-term future health of Queenslanders. As a result, the real impact of this plan may not be evident for many years. However, the government will monitor and evaluate the success of these initiatives. This plan will be reviewed annually by the IAG to ensure the priorities and initiatives outlined in the plan remain relevant.

Each agency represented on the IAG with responsibilities under the plan will report annually to WHSQ on their performance under the plan.

The Attorney-General and Minister for Justice will report to government on progress under the plan. This will be coordinated by the Department of Justice and Attorney-General in consultation with the IAG.

Annual progress reports will also be made available on the government's asbestos website at: asbestos.qld.gov.au.

Acronyms/abbreviations

DATSIMA	Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Multicultural Affairs
DEHP	Department of Environment and Heritage Protection
DHPW	Department of Housing and Public Works
DJAG	Department of Justice and Attorney-General
DNRM	Department of Natural Resources and Mines
DoH	Department of Health
IAG	Interagency Asbestos Group
LGAQ	Local Government Association of Queensland
WHSQ	Workplace Health and Safety Queensland

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