



ASBESTOS

Norfolk Island Regional Council provides the following information on asbestos handling for both individuals and the business community for awareness of their responsibilities when it comes to asbestos handling, along with details of Council's management practices and the challenges we face due to geography and isolation.

What is asbestos?

Asbestos is a naturally occurring mineral fibre that was widely used in building materials up until 1985. It contains strong fibres that have excellent durability, fire resistance and insulation properties. The use of materials containing asbestos was very common in the residential building industry between the 1940s and late 1980s before their production stopped. At the time, the health risks associated with asbestos were not known. The use of all forms of asbestos has been banned since 31 December 2003. The ban does not apply to asbestos installed prior to this date (e.g., asbestos materials in houses).

Friable asbestos refers to asbestos-containing materials that can be easily crumbled, pulverised, or reduced to powder by hand pressure when dry. Examples include sprayed-on asbestos insulation, pipe lagging, or damaged asbestos-containing ceiling tiles. These materials are highly hazardous because they can release tiny asbestos fibres into the air, which can be inhaled and cause serious health issues like asbestosis, lung cancer, or mesothelioma.

Non-friable asbestos refers to asbestos-containing materials where the asbestos fibres are tightly bound within a solid matrix, making them less likely to release fibres when undisturbed. These materials are hard and cannot be easily crumbled by hand pressure when dry. Examples include asbestos cement sheets, vinyl floor tiles, and certain roofing materials. While less hazardous than friable asbestos, non-friable asbestos can still pose risks if damaged or improperly handled.

Only licensed professionals with proper training, equipment, and permits should handle friable asbestos to ensure safety and compliance with regulations. If you suspect friable asbestos in your environment, contact a certified asbestos removalist.

Why is it harmful?

Asbestos fibres are released into the air during activities that disturb asbestos-containing materials. Asbestos fibres are around 50 to 200 times thinner than a human hair, can be invisible and breathed in easily.

Breathing in asbestos fibres has been linked to the following health effects:

- Asbestosis (progressive and irreversible scarring of lung tissue that impairs breathing);
- Lung cancer;
- Mesothelioma which is cancer of the lining around the lungs and abdomen;
- Non-cancerous diseases that affect the linings around the lungs and abdomen (commonly called 'benign asbestos pleural effusion').



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How and where is asbestos commonly used?

Being around asbestos materials does not necessarily create a health risk, as long as there is no damage to the materials – it is only when particles are disturbed and become airborne and are inhaled that you should be concerned. The hazard may be present during renovating or demolishing buildings; or cleaning up from those activities and during clean up after natural disasters. Some materials are presumed to contain asbestos if installed before 1981.

Examples of these materials, as well as other presumed asbestos-containing materials are:

- thermal system insulation;
- roofing and siding shingles;
- vinyl floor tiles;
- plaster, cement, putties, and caulk;
- ceiling tiles and spray-on coatings;
- industrial pipe wrapping; and
- heat-resistant textiles.

How do I know if a material in my house contains asbestos?

Careful examination of a sample using specialised microscopic procedures can be completed at a National Association of Testing Authorities (NATA) accredited laboratory to confirm whether a material contains asbestos.

As a general rule, if your home was built before 1990, it is likely to contain some asbestos materials. A knowledge of building products that contained asbestos can help to determine if asbestos is present. Asbestos was used in more than 3000 products and applications, and it is estimated to be in one in three homes across Australia.

How do I dispose of asbestos?

Asbestos is regulated waste and cannot be disposed of at the Recycling Pods or at the Construction and Demolition/Bulky waste area of the Waste Management Centre (WMC).

If you are disposing of asbestos, you must ensure it has been packaged appropriately before delivering to the WMC. PLEASE CONTACT COUNCIL BEFORE THE DELIVERY TO DISCUSS WHEN THE DELIVERY WILL BE MADE. Upon arrival, WMC staff will inspect and measure the box/bags containing the asbestos waste in order to issue an invoice. The disposal fee for asbestos is included in NIRC's Operational Plan - Fees and Charges which can be found on Council's website. Packaging requirements are shown below:

- Double-wrapped in 200um plastic and contained in 200um plastic lined plywood crates, securely strapped.
- Crates must be made of 18mm marine plywood.
- Enclosed in transport-approved asbestos hazibags rated up to 1.5 tonnes and securely strapped to wooden pallets.
- Packages must not exceed a maximum size of 2400mm in length and 1200mm in width.
- Labelled with stickers of at least 75mm x 90mm in size, displaying the following warning: "CAUTION ASBESTOS. DO NOT OPEN OR DAMAGE BAG. DO NOT INHALE DUST."



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How does Council manage illegal dumping of asbestos?

Due to the number of recent incidents, the Construction and Demolition/Bulky waste area will now be locked and manned at all times. All loads will be inspected before disposal of sorted waste in the correct bay is allowed.

What are the penalties for illegal dumping of asbestos?

Apart from the risk of breathing in deadly fibres and developing serious illnesses later in life, there are penalties applicable under the *Waste Management Act 2003* (NI). Council will also issue the below charges for asbestos inappropriately dumped at the Waste Management Centre.

Fees and Charges - Mixed Waste Unsorted recyclable and non-recyclable waste, including excessive organics and sanitary material contamination (m3) \$250.00 2024/25. They will also be charged with having a licenced asbestos removalist pack the material as well as disposal fees as per Councils Fees and Charges.

Why is there a stockpile of asbestos on Norfolk Island? How is it stored? Is it safe?

Illegal dumping of asbestos in construction and bulky waste is an ongoing problem creating hazardous conditions for waste management staff that needs to be carefully managed. In addition, the high cost of exporting asbestos and the lack of shipping options has resulted in a backlog of the material from the island.

Exporting asbestos waste off-island is costly for residents, due to transport and mandatory NATA testing to ensure safety standards are complied with. During February 2021, Council exported approximately 260 tonnes of bonded asbestos off-island. In 2023 there was another opportunity to ship off approximately 3.5 tonnes. Since that time, there has not been another opportunity to ship asbestos of island as it needs to be via containerised shipping. This is the reason why we have a stockpile.

Some of these bags have deteriorated over time and Council has appropriately repacked them into hazibags and containerised them according to compliant storage standards (see images below).



Before



After

How is Council managing the legacy asbestos on the island?

A stockpile has recently been made to temporarily store the waste while an appropriate permanent solution is established. This stockpile is being covered with soil or mulch to prevent exposure to the air and to prevent generation of dust from the waste.

This stockpile is located within the WMC area which has restricted access and located away from public use.



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Are there alternatives to export?

One proposed alternative is developing an engineered disposal pit on Norfolk Island for asbestos waste, which could reduce the high costs and reliance on export but requires significant investment and environmental approvals.

NIRC has prioritised the completion of a new draft Waste Strategy, with clear timelines and stakeholder input, and will conduct a feasibility study for the construction and management of an on-island disposal pit, assessing environmental impact, regulatory requirements, and long-term costs versus exporting.

Is there a risk of contamination of groundwater by stored asbestos?

Unregulated or illegal disposal of asbestos in unlined pits or near water sources could pose a localised risk, though still primarily to surface water rather than groundwater.

The risk of groundwater contamination from properly stored asbestos is minimal due to its chemical stability and insolubility in water. However, improper storage or handling of asbestos, especially friable forms, could lead to environmental release of fibres, primarily affecting air or surface water rather than groundwater.

Heavy rainfall or flooding at storage sites could dislodge asbestos fibres, increasing the chance of environmental spread, though direct groundwater contamination remains unlikely.

To avoid risks, only trained professionals should handle, store, or dispose of asbestos-containing materials. If you suspect asbestos on your property, contact a licensed asbestos inspector or removalist for safe management.

What does Council do with asbestos once packaged correctly?

Exporting asbestos waste off island is costly for residents, due to transport and mandatory NATA testing to ensure safety standards are complied with. The material is stored in a restricted area until a permanent solution is established.

How do I report a concern about asbestos?

If you suspect unsafe handling, removal, or transportation of asbestos materials by a business, contractor, or individual at a commercial property, contact Council's Customer Care team. Report your concerns promptly to ensure safe management of asbestos and compliance with regulations.

Contact Details:

- Phone: (+6723) 22001 or local freecall 0100
- Email: customer care@nirc.gov.nf
- Opening Hours: Monday to Friday, 9:00am - 4:00pm



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Who should I contact if I have questions about asbestos in my home or office renovation?

Asbestos Removalists on the Island:

Michael Porter – Phone: 55588

Darren Nicolai – Phone: 50695

Where can I learn more about safe asbestos handling and disposal for my house renovation?

The Queensland Government offers detailed resources, including guides for construction workers and contractors.

www.worksafe.qld.gov.au

www.asbestos.qld.gov.au

www.asbestos.qld.gov.au/resources/frequently-asked-questions-homeowners-and-general-public

Restricted Areas

Avoiding restricted areas is critical to ensuring safety of the public. Unauthorised access or disturbance of these areas could lead to accidental exposure, regulatory violations, or community concerns, undermining the safe containment of hazardous materials or high-risk activities. By strictly adhering to designated zones and following regulatory guidelines, the Norfolk Island Regional Council can protect public health and ensure safe operations can occur.