

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Loose-fill asbestos insulation

What is loose-fill asbestos insulation?

This is insulation made from raw asbestos that has been crushed into a fine state and installed in ceiling space. If disturbed, fibres can migrate from the ceiling to other areas of the home, such as walls and sub-floor areas or become airborne and inhaled or ingested which may cause health risks.

However the risk of exposure to asbestos in buildings containing loose-fill asbestos is likely to be very low if the asbestos is undisturbed and sealed off.

What is meant by houses in NSW that are impacted by 'Mr Fluffy'?

During the 1960s and 1970s, pure loose-fill asbestos was sold as ceiling insulation for residential and commercial premises. A Canberra based company known as 'Mr Fluffy' installed this insulation in around 1000 houses in the ACT.

Mr Fluffy is understood to have also installed insulation in homes in NSW. A second contractor, Bowers Asphalt was identified in a 1969 ACT Health Services Branch report as using loose-fill asbestos for ceiling insulation, but only for large non-residential buildings.

How many houses in NSW have been impacted by Mr Fluffy?

It is not known how many properties in NSW have this type of insulation. In response to community concerns, the NSW Government launched an independent investigation in August 2014 to establish the number of residential properties with ceiling insulation that may contain loose-fill asbestos material.

However, sampling programs, between 1989 and 2009, identified 13 properties in the Queanbeyan and surrounding areas as containing asbestos material installed by Mr Fluffy.

What other areas of NSW has loose-fill asbestos insulation been found?

Sampling indicated that 11 residential properties (including one apartment building with 38 units) in the Queanbeyan Local Government Area (LGA), one property in the Palerang Council LGA and one property in Yass Valley Council LGA were also identified as containing loose-fill asbestos insulation.

The investigation will review and assess relevant records including inspections reports, risk assessments and compliance and disposal records. An independent specialist to work with the NSW Heads of Asbestos Coordination Authorities (HACA) to help establish the scope of properties impacted.

What is being done to educate the community about risks associated with loose-fill asbestos insulation?

In NSW, the HACA has written to councils in those areas where insulation material has or may have been transported by Mr Fluffy.

HACA has advised councils to update their asbestos policies in line with the *NSW Model Asbestos Policy* to ensure adequate risk management and exposure reduction and residents are aware of safety control measures for loose-fill insulation.

HACA will continue to fund a dedicated asbestos policy project manager at Local Government NSW throughout 2015 and 2016, to support and assist councils in adopting and implementing the *Model Asbestos Policy* across the state.

How do I know if my residence has loose-fill asbestos insulation?

The independent investigation, coordinated by WorkCover NSW will help to establish the number of residential properties with ceiling insulation that may contain loose-fill asbestos material.

Concerned residents in homes built before 1980 can contact WorkCover to see if they are eligible to have their property tested and assessed for the material.

How can I satisfy myself that my home is safe if loose asbestos is present?

A licensed asbestos assessor can advise you whether your living spaces are well sealed and asbestos hazards are appropriately controlled. A listing of licensed asbestos assessors can be found at workcover.nsw.gov.au

What services are available to residents concerned about Mr Fluffy insulation?

Free testing services and property assessments are available to eligible residences. Contact WorkCover on **13 10 50** to determine eligibility and how to apply.

What will the testing service do?

A free testing service will be available for a 12 month period to eligible residents where suspected loose-fill asbestos may be present in homes built prior to 1980.

Samples of material will be tested to determine if they are loose-fill asbestos.

Contact WorkCover on **13 10 50** to apply for the testing service.

How do I organise a free property assessment?

Free independent technical assessments will be offered for a 12 month period to eligible affected homeowners to advise on and confirm the adequacy of risk controls in each of the identified homes.

The assessments will be undertaken by a licensed asbestos assessor.

Contact WorkCover on **13 10 50** to determine eligibility for the free sampling service.

What do I do if loose-fill asbestos insulation is discovered in my home?

Where a sample is confirmed to be loose-fill asbestos the resident will be eligible for a technical assessment to provide advice on adequate risk control measures.

How do I manage risks associated with loose-fill asbestos?

To manage any risk associated with this type of insulation it is necessary to identify, assess and secure containment controls to prevent exposure pathways. This includes the elimination of asbestos hazards at time of renovation or demolition of house.

A [licensed asbestos assessor](#) will be able to advise on hazards and appropriate controls.

Testing of homes with loose-fill asbestos insulation has shown that exposure is likely to be very low if the asbestos is undisturbed and remains sealed off at all points where entry of asbestos into living areas can occur (including cornices, architraves, around vents, around light fittings, manholes and tops of cupboards).

How is loose-fill asbestos removed?

Only qualified tradespeople with asbestos awareness training can work on any areas identified with asbestos. Removal of loose-fill asbestos fibres may only be done by a Class A licensed asbestos removalist.

Those houses insulated with loose-fill asbestos can either organise for its removal by engaging a Class A [licensed asbestos removalist](#) or contain the loose material by effective and durable sealing.

Can I renovate my house if I suspect loose-fill asbestos is present?

Home owners should not undertake any refurbishment work that requires alteration to any walls, ceilings, wall sockets or removal of cornices, no cabling (unless surface mounted) or additional sockets or outlets recessed in walls and avoid accessing subfloor areas until a further assessment under controlled conditions can be conducted.

Where can I go for more information?

Visit asbestosawareness.com.au to learn where asbestos might be found in your home and how to manage it safely. For more information about working with asbestos contact the WorkCover Customer Service Centre on **13 10 50**.

Disclaimer

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Information on the latest laws can be checked by visiting the NSW legislation website legislation.nsw.gov.au

This publication does not represent a comprehensive statement of the law as it applies to particular problems or to individuals or as a substitute for legal advice. You should seek independent legal advice if you need assistance on the application of the law to your situation.

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