

Safety and health alert

04/10 Exposure to Asbestos

Incident

Workers were exposed to asbestos-containing material when an employee used a battery-operated drill to attach a loose post to a wall containing asbestos material. The employee drilled a series of holes in the asbestos-containing wall, exposing himself and cleaners to asbestos. The building was built in the 1930s and was likely to contain asbestos material.

Contributing Factors

- Workplaces built before 1990 are likely to contain asbestos material.
- The presence and locations of asbestos at the workplace had not been identified.
- The risk due to asbestos at the workplace had not been assessed.
- An asbestos register was not present at the workplace.
- Asbestos-containing materials were not labelled.
- Workers and persons conducting maintenance, repairs and cleaning had not been informed about the presence of asbestos at the workplace and the associated risks.
- A powered hand tool without appropriate dust suppression or dust extraction attachments designed to collect asbestos fibres was used to drill holes in the asbestos-containing material.
- A conventional vacuum cleaner was used to clean up asbestos dust and material.

Recommendations

Employers, persons having control of the workplace, main contractors and self employed persons all have responsibilities relating to asbestos at the workplace, including the duties listed below.

1. Identify the presence and locations of asbestos at the workplace and assess the risks in accordance with the Code of Practice for the Management and Control of Asbestos in Workplaces [NOHSC:2018(2005)].
2. Provide a current asbestos register at the workplace and provide information to workers on the asbestos register and the presence of asbestos.
3. Label asbestos-containing materials at the workplace.
4. Make the asbestos register available to supervisors and workers prior to the commencement of any maintenance, repair or cleaning work on identified or suspected asbestos, so that safe work methods can be put in place.
5. Conduct all work involving asbestos cement building materials in accordance with Part 9 of the Code of Practice for the Safe Removal of Asbestos 2nd Edition [NOHSC:2002(2005)].

Further information

- [Occupational Safety and Health Regulations 1996 - regulations 5.42 – 5.52 relating to asbestos](#)
- [Code of Practice for the Management and Control of Asbestos in Workplaces \[NOHSC:2018\(2005\)\]](#)
- [Code of Practice for the Safe Removal of Asbestos 2nd Edition \[NOHSC:2002\(2005\)\]](#).

Further information can be obtained from WorkSafe's internet site www.worksafe.wa.gov.au or by contacting customer service on 1300 307 877 or email safety@commerce.wa.gov.au

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