



Essential guide: our Critical Risk expectations

Asbestos

The word **MUST** means it is a mandatory requirement. Where you see the words **YOUR CALL** it means you are strongly advised to do this, but you can use your judgement.



What is asbestos?

Asbestos is the name applied to a number of naturally occurring minerals that are mined from the earth and consist mainly of fibrous calcium and magnesium silicates.

The three commercial types of asbestos found in New Zealand are:

- White (Chrysotile) asbestos - the most common type
- Brown (Amosite) asbestos
- Blue (Crocidolite) asbestos

How is it harmful?

Exposure to asbestos fibres can affect your respiratory system and lead to lung cancers.

Occupational exposure is the primary cause of asbestos-related illnesses, followed by second-hand asbestos exposure.

No exposure to asbestos is considered safe, but it is accepted that asbestos generally has the worst effects when a person is exposed to an intense concentration, or they are exposed on a regular basis over a long period of time.

The exposure vs illness timeframe can be many years, most cases diagnosed today were caused by asbestos exposures that occurred before modern safety regulations and workplace controls came into effect.

What is asbestos used for?

The use of asbestos dates back to the Pharaohs but has become more prevalent in the 20th century. As a result of its insulative and bonding properties asbestos has been widely used. It is commonly found in construction materials in older buildings.

Because of its wide historical use, it is accepted that asbestos may be present at extremely low levels throughout our environment.

I think I've been exposed, what do I do?

You **MUST** report the exposure to your manager. We will need to get some more information to allow us to assess the risk:

- when and where?
- do we know the material was asbestos and what condition was it in?
- how were you exposed?
- what fibres were present and what quantities?
- what were the environmental conditions?
- what PPE were you wearing?

What happens if we establish that there could be an occupational health risk?

We will put you on an asbestos register to record your exposure and we will take samples and test the material to confirm if it is asbestos. This is done so there is a causal link if you do develop a diagnosed respiratory illness.



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PPE and asbestos?

Harm from asbestos is primarily caused through the inhalation of fibres so we **MUST** protect our respiratory system through the use of the appropriate respiratory protection.

To make sure you don't place yourself, or others at risk by contaminating clothing or footwear with asbestos fibres you **MUST**:

- ensure respirators or masks are able to provide protection, the level of protection offered **MUST** be a minimum of P2
- undertake a risk assessment of the work environment and consider any factors which may require a higher level of protection.

What other PPE **MUST** I use?

Gloves, disposable overalls, eye protection and shoes that are able to be washed after exposure. This is primarily to prevent cross-contamination.

Please consider the following additional controls that could be employed:

- formal notification of hazardous works
- demarcating the area
- pre-work dampening of the area
- signage, informing others in the workplace
- having spare PPE available for people coming to site
- a pre-work safety brief specifically dealing with the risks of asbestos exposure from the work
- a process to manage decontamination.

When to wear respiratory protection

You **MUST** wear respiratory protection whenever you're working in an environment where there is potential for asbestos fibres to be present. Refer to your asbestos register on your site to see where asbestos has been previously identified.

Remember even if sampling, you should apply universal precautions.



Disposable masks or a respirator?

It's **YOUR CALL** as to whether you choose to wear a disposable P2 mask or for a greater level of protection, a respirator.

The use of either full face or half mask respirator with a P2 cartridge offers a greater level of protection.

While a full-face respirator does offer combined respiratory and eye protection, a half mask and a good fitting pair of safety glasses will achieve the same result, it's **YOUR CALL**.

The important thing is that any respirator fully seals on your face and that you have no obstructions that might affect the seal such as facial hair. You **MUST** always test your respirator for seal prior to use.