

Asbestos Fact Sheet – 3/09/2020

Asbestos was used extensively in building materials across Australia from the 1940s to the 1980s. It was phased out completely after being banned in 2003. That means that asbestos-containing materials (ACMs) are still present in approximately one-third of buildings in Victoria, including public school buildings.

The Department of Education and Training completed a statewide audit in 2016 to identify where these ACMs were in public schools. We immediately removed all the material considered high risk, and by 2020 we'll have removed ACMs that may pose a future risk. For more information, see <https://www.schoolbuildings.vic.gov.au/Pages/Asbestos-removal-from-schools.aspx#factsheet>

Labelling the remaining school buildings containing lower-risk asbestos is part of a health and safety plan created in partnership with WorkSafe Victoria. This labelling requirement is not only exclusive to schools, but is now required for all types of workplaces in Victoria.

Labelling helps the Department of Education and Training and the schools maintain safety by inducting contractors coming to work on school sites and ensuring they do not inadvertently disturb any ACMs. As there are currently no high risk ACMs in school buildings, the existing materials are bonded and would not release harmful asbestos fibres into the air unless disturbed through destructive works. The labels are one measure to direct contractors to undertake building works that involve ACMs using qualified professionals, and under controlled conditions that align with the OHS regulations.

In addition to labelling, the Department's Asbestos Management Framework includes other activities that support schools to safely manage asbestos, including:

- undertaking a 'Division 5' asbestos audit at least every five years to identify and rate the risk of ACMs
- clearly defined roles and responsibilities and procedures within the school to effectively manage asbestos risks, including having a dedicated asbestos coordinator to implement the Asbestos Management Plan
- undertaking asbestos awareness training to ensure best practice in asbestos management and compliance with occupational health and safety regulations
- conducting quarterly inspections to ensure identified ACMs have not deteriorated
- calling the 24-hour asbestos hotline, by phoning 1300 133 468, to respond to asbestos incidents.

For more information, see the Department's Occupational Health and Safety Management System: <https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/occupational-health-and-safety-management-system-ohsms/policy>