

## Safety Alert

# Asbestos found in external and internal render

The purpose of this Safety Alert is to alert businesses and workers to the importance of asbestos testing before commencing work in older buildings. Asbestos causes cancer and the importation and use of asbestos has been banned in Australia since 31 December 2003.

## Background

Two incidents have occurred in Darwin where asbestos has been found in locations not expected by the contractors. Asbestos was used in over 3,000 products and can be found in many buildings and structures built or renovated before 1990 in the Northern Territory. Testing by a NATA approved laboratory is the only way to confirm the presence of asbestos.

In the first incident, contractors engaged to demolish an old commercial building conducted sampling and asbestos testing before they commenced work. A sample of the buildings external cement render returned positive for asbestos despite the external render not being listed as a location for asbestos in the building asbestos register. Additional sampling and testing of the external render from around the building all returned positive results.

In the second incident, contractors renovating a residential house drilled into a concrete ceiling which had a vermiculite coating. Vermiculite is a spray-on textured ceiling finish popularly used in the 1970's to early 80's. Asbestos has previously been found in some vermiculite. The concerned homeowner had a licensed asbestos assessor test the vermiculite which returned positive for asbestos. At least six workers and the homeowner have potentially been exposed to asbestos fibres.



Image: The asbestos containing vermiculite (left). The asbestos containing external render (right).

## Possible contributing factors

- The asbestos register for the commercial building did not list the external render as containing asbestos as the person creating the register may not have sampled and tested the render as they didn't think it would contain asbestos.
- The contractors renovating the residential house did not think the vermiculite coating would contain asbestos and did not sample and test. Not all vermiculite contains asbestos.

## Action required

- All businesses and workers contracted to work on buildings built or renovated before 1990, should follow the [How to manage and control asbestos in the workplace](#) Code of Practice.
- It is recommended that a [licensed asbestos removalist](#) or [licensed asbestos assessor](#) be engaged to assist with identification, sampling and testing of potential asbestos and asbestos containing material in the work area before work commences.
- Products or material, that could be asbestos, likely to be disturbed by your works, that are not listed in the asbestos register, should be treated as asbestos until testing confirms otherwise.

## Further information

For further information, please refer to the following:

### Incident information release

- Lack of checks leads to asbestos contamination of two homes

### Code of Practice

- [How to manage and control asbestos in the workplace](#)
- [How to safely remove asbestos](#)

### Disclaimer

*This Safety Alert contains safety information following inquiries made by NT WorkSafe about an incident or unsafe practice. The information contained in this Alert does not necessarily include the outcome of NT WorkSafe's action with respect to an incident. NT WorkSafe does not warrant the information in this Alert is complete or up-to-date and does not accept any liability for the information in this report or as to its use.*