

Asbestos Management in Schools

Overview

Building materials containing asbestos in schools were in widespread use in New Zealand and overseas until the 1980s because of its fire-resistant properties.

Where asbestos is left in place and is in good condition (not friable), it does not pose a significant health and safety risk. However, if it is disturbed during refurbishment, demolition or excavation there is a risk of asbestos fibres becoming airborne and creating a health risk.

The Health and Safety at Work (Asbestos) Regulations 2016 (Regulations) place a requirement on PCBUs such as schools to eliminate exposure of persons to airborne asbestos so far as is reasonably practicable, and if not to minimise exposure to airborne asbestos.

Identifying Asbestos in Schools

Where asbestos is likely, it needs to be identified and managed appropriately so far as is reasonably practicable. If you identify, or assume the presence of asbestos in a building, an Asbestos Management Plan is required.

How to identify asbestos:

- If your building was built prior to 1 January 2000 it is likely to contain asbestos containing material and you could assume that your school building contains asbestos
- You could follow the WorkSafe Approved Code of Practice Guidance to identify what is likely to contain asbestos
- You could consider training your staff to better understand how to identify asbestos
- Or you can employ a surveyor to assess your building.

What is an Asbestos Management Plan?

An Asbestos Management Plan sets out how the identified asbestos or asbestos containing material will be managed.

The plan must include information about:

- Where your asbestos has been identified – in which wall, window etc
- How you plan to manage the asbestos risks (remove it, encapsulate it with a false wall or paint, leave it alone as it is in good condition, etc)

- What procedures you will follow when work is to be undertaken
- How you will record incidents or emergencies involving asbestos
- A timetable for managing asbestos exposure risks (e.g. priorities and dates for removal, reviews, circumstances and activities that could affect the timing of action) – which could be reviewed in six months, or after an incident or emergency
- Procedures, including a timetable for reviewing and (if necessary) revising the plan and asbestos documentation (note at a minimum this MUST be every 5 years).

An Asbestos Management Plan template for use by schools is available at: www.education.govt.nz/asbestos/.

Do you need an Asbestos Management Plan?

Where asbestos has been identified or is assumed to exist in a school building or buildings, the Regulations place a duty on schools as PCBUs to have a plan in place.

If the condition of the identified or assumed asbestos changes then you would need to alter the plan accordingly.

Where remedial work such as refurbishment or demolition is planned, a refurbishment or demolition asbestos survey must be undertaken.

What should a written plan look like?

All plans must be in writing. They can be in hard copy or electronic form, as long as the legally required information outlined above is included.

Do I need a surveyor to do this?

No, you can create your own plan as long as you follow WorkSafe guidance – the Approved Code of Practice.

It is up to schools to take steps to identify asbestos. The exception is that if you are doing refurbishment work you will need a refurbishment and demolition survey followed by an Asbestos Removal Control Plan if the asbestos is to be removed.