



Government of **Western Australia**
Department of **Health**

Managing contamination from pressure water cleaning of asbestos cement roofs

Local government authority guide

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Purpose

The use of pressure water (or air) equipment to clean asbestos cement (AC) sheeting is prohibited under the *Health (Asbestos) Regulations 1992* (HA Regs) and *Work Health and Safety (General) Regulations 2022* (WHS Regs).

Pressure water cleaning AC sheeting can erode the surface layer, especially of asbestos roofs, and release asbestos fibres in a cement 'slurry' that deposits on and contaminates many surfaces of both the source and adjacent properties or areas, including paving, foliage, garden beds, lawns, outdoor furniture, roofs, and gutters. The residue once dry and if disturbed can release asbestos fibres into the air.

Local government environmental health officers (EHOs), as authorised persons, may need to respond to complaints and initiate actions under the HA Regs, which is the normal public health regulatory instrument. However, these authorised persons also have additional relevant powers under the Public Health Act 2016.

This advice has been prepared to provide guidance to EHOs when dealing with such incidents, which can pose difficulties from an enforcement perspective. This advice is focused on high pressure water cleaning of AC roofs, but the principles can apply to managing any high-pressure water, or to some extent high-pressure air cleaning, of asbestos cement products in general. It should be read and used in conjunction with the HA Regs.



Images: Asbestos contamination from high-pressure water cleaning an asbestos roof

Regulatory authority

As complaints are often first directed to the local government authority, it is preferable that a competent person (such as an EHO) provides the initial response.

While the HA Regs apply to all situations related to an asbestos incident, it is generally accepted that in an occupational setting WorkSafe will be the lead agency. It is recommended that the EHO normally only initiate compliance action against a householder or non-commercial operator for a potential breach. The local government authority is the primary regulator outside of a workplace.

Where the pressure cleaning is carried out by a worker, contractor or self-employed person the matter can be reported/referred to WorkSafe via their client services centre on 1300 307 877. If the EHO is the first responder to an incident, the EHO may request, or if necessary direct, the person to cease the activity and vacate and secure access to the area. If at a workplace, the EHO can ensure arrangements are in place for interim management of the site until WorkSafe inspectors respond.

Note A written direction can be issued under Regulation 8 of the HA Regs or alternatively, options under the *Public Health Act 2016* include issuing in writing an Improvement Notice under S212 or in the case of a serious public health risk, an Enforcement Order. However, it may be more practicable to warn of the health risks, as well as the likelihood they are committing an offence under WHS and/or Public Health legislation, to encourage the operator to cease.

If WorkSafe cannot respond in a timely fashion, and homeowners or the public are at risk, the EHO may need to undertake a series of management actions for as long as necessary.

Even in those situations where WorkSafe is the primary regulator and manages most of the following processes it may be beneficial for the EHO to continue to engage especially where surrounding residential properties and public areas are impacted to ensure public health risks are managed.

Initial response

First responders should wear outer protective clothing (disposable overalls, gloves) and respiratory equipment (Class P1 or P2 facemask) on arrival at the site. In the case of an EHO, if not suitably equipped then entry into impacted areas should be minimised.

If it is suspected the roof is AC and pressure cleaning is still occurring, a verbal recommendation should be given for work to cease.

An initial visual assessment should be carried out to identify the extent of impact (asbestos cement residue) at source and taking note of affected public areas and neighbouring properties.

The EHO should advise the owner/offender and adjoining residents to keep the impacted areas wetted down, undisturbed and isolated. This may need to extend to impacted machinery such as A/Cs and vehicles to the extent practical.

This advice may need to take the form of a written notice to ensure compliance and that the necessary actions are understood.

Where residue has impacted a local road or public area, it may need to be secured off in consultation with relevant agency, to prevent disturbance and further transfer. If it is a major thoroughfare, emergency responders may need to remediate immediately.

Photos/video footage of impact should be obtained as these may be used as evidence.

For legal purposes, samples of the residue should be collected (from source and neighbouring properties). Clear sticky-tape samples may be safest and most practical. This will verify if asbestos is present. Samples should be clearly labelled with place of collection, date, and time. A sample location sketch map may be useful.

Where the incident results from paid work, the EHO should notify WorkSafe with supporting information. Depending on the likely WorkSafe response this may obviate the need for some of the above actions by an EHO.

Planning and implementing clean-up

Asbestos residue created by high-pressure water cleaning is considered friable. Once confirmed by sampling as asbestos, its remediation in an occupational setting requires a **Class A licensed asbestos removalist** with appropriate equipment and expertise. Even outside an occupational setting, any direction issued under the HAR Regs for friable removal work should specify use of a Class A licensed asbestos removalist. No other person should undertake this work.

The containment, labelling, transport, and disposal of asbestos waste should be conducted in accordance with *Environmental (Controlled Waste) Regulations 2004* and the EHO may request evidence of compliance through the written notice issued under the HA Regs.

Where action is initiated under the HA Regs, instructions for removal (with an appropriate time frame), should be given as a written notice (Reg 8 (1)) to the offender.

The written notice will require a Class A licensed asbestos removalist to do the work and a licensed asbestos assessor to delineate the impacted area and monitor and validate the work.

As clean up may involve adjoining properties, those property owners need to give consent and be consulted on the extent of the proposed asbestos removal work.

The EHO must request a clearance inspection of the asbestos removal area to verify that it is safe for normal use as part of the written notice. The inspection must include visual inspection and may include air monitoring and material sampling.

Relocation of immediate residents

Where there has been extensive impact of the source or adjoining properties (and public concern) and residents are unable to access their property without disturbing asbestos contamination, they should be advised to relocate until clean up and remediation is completed.

Non-compliance

In cases of non-compliance with a direction (Regulation 8A) a local government authority may arrange for the work to be carried out by a Class A licensed asbestos removalist of their choosing, in accordance with an Asbestos Removal Control Plan and WHS Regs and *Environmental (Controlled Waste) Regulations 2004* and recover their costs.

Validation and clearance inspections

An independent assessment (and clearance certificate) as required by the WHS Regs should form part of the clearance inspection and site clearance process.

In addition, the authorised officer/EHO may wish to conduct their own inspection to assess (visually), that residues have been effectively removed.

Further information

Further inquiries can be directed to the Department's Environmental Health Directorate on (08) 9222 2000 or email DOH.Chemicalhazards@health.wa.gov.au. Information about health-related aspects of asbestos and its management is available at [Environmental Hazards](#).

WorkSafe can be contacted via their client services centre on 1300 307 877

Additional information is available from [Code of practice - How to safely remove asbestos | Department of Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety \(commerce.wa.gov.au\)](#).

This document can be made available in alternative formats on request for a person with disability.

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