**ASBESTOS INFORMATION SHEET**

Asbestos is a naturally occurring fibrous material used in building products manufactured before 1989. Asbestos was a popular building material because of its fire resistant and insulation properties, before its subsequent ban in Australia in 2003 due to health concerns.

Inhalation of asbestos fibres is known to cause serious health hazards in humans, namely mesothelioma.

**Is all asbestos harmful?**

If Asbestos Containing Materials (ACMs) are in good condition and left undisturbed, it is unlikely that asbestos fibres will be released into the air and the health risk is **extremely low**.

In the majority of cases, it is safer to leave ACMs fixed or installed and periodically review their condition over time. However, if an ACM has deteriorated, been disturbed or dust is present, the likelihood that asbestos fibres will be released into the air is increased.

**The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development has a comprehensive asbestos management program to ensure Victorian Government schools are safe for all students and staff.**

**Management of asbestos**

The safe management of asbestos is a priority. The Department’s management program includes long and short term measures to ensure schools are informed and supported in confidently and successfully managing asbestos. These measures include:

* Individual school Asbestos Management Plans which identify where asbestos is located in schools and how to effectively manage it.
* Regular Departmental audits that provide a point-in-time snapshot of asbestos conditions at schools to assist them in forward planning.
* Comprehensive training provided to key school staff to ensure they can implement their Asbestos Management Plans effectively.
* A 24 hour hotline to ensure an immediate response when needed - the hotline connects schools to experts who provide advice, and can conduct immediate site visits and remediation or removal works.

**Asbestos Management Plans**

Schools are required by Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) law to have individual Asbestos Management Plans, which identify where any asbestos is at the school. As schools manage their own assets, they also manage their own asbestos plans – updating them after renovations or capital works.

Parents can ask to see their school’s Asbestos Management Plan at any time.

**Audits**

The Department audits asbestos in Victorian schools on an ongoing basis, ensuring schools are properly identifying asbestos conditions and implementing their management plans.

**Training**

Training of school staff is one of the most effective ways for schools to manage asbestos risk.

The Department offers regular training sessions for principals and staff. Through this training, principals and key staff learn to conduct thorough and regular checks of their schools and to make detailed updates to their Asbestos Management Plans.

Principals are trained to identify risk early, forward plan for removal at the best time for the school, and to engage their school communities in this process.

**24 Hour Hotline**

To provide a further level of assurance, the Department’s expert contractor operates a 24 hour hotline. When risks emerge at schools – or if schools require additional support – responsive and expert assistance is available via the hotline.

The Department has long term contracts with leading experts who manage the removal of asbestos. These experts are available via the hotline – and can carry out immediate inspections and removal works.

**Examples of Asbestos Containing Materials (ACMs) in schools**

* Asbestos cement sheet (roofs, eaves, wall and ceiling linings)
* Asbestos cement moulded products (gutters, cable pits, heater flue and pipework)
* Electrical switchboards, insulators and fittings
* Fire rated doors and safes
* Vinyl floor tiles and adhesives
* Textiles (rope seals, woven cloth, blankets)
* Gaskets

**OHS Advisory Service**

For information about asbestos or general OHS enquiries contact the DEECD OHS Advisory service on 1300 074 715.