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Are you demolishing or renovating? Check for asbestos

If you are thinking of renovating that old cottage or demolishing your old shed or family home, you need to be aware of the dangers of asbestos.

The hazards and risks of breathing in asbestos fibres have been highlighted over many years. Shoalhaven City Council is asking all renovators and builders to be aware to reduce the risk of exposure.

Many building materials could contain asbestos, especially structural materials such as fibro. But asbestos can also be found in vinyl floor tiles, lagging, insulation and paints. In fact asbestos is found in more than 3,000 different materials.

It is safest to assume that any old fibro product will contain asbestos. If it is broken, has been subject to fire or is in a "friable" condition, the material must be very carefully handled so as to prevent the asbestos fibres becoming airborne. The spread of airborne fibres could be inhaled with potential to cause cancer in later years.

Any land on which friable asbestos has come into contact may become contaminated. As such it must be reported to Council's Environmental services Section for appropriate action.

Shoalhaven City Acting Mayor Councillor Gareth Ward said that people's awareness of the risks is the easiest and best solution for dealing with this old product.

"If you are seeking advice or further information on asbestos materials in your home the best place to contact is WorkCover NSW," Cllr Ward said. "Alternatively, your local council may be able to provide some advice or a really useful internet site (published by the NSW Government, James Hardie and the ACTU) is www.thinkasbestos.com.au.

"So when you need to demolish an old dwelling, all citizens should take care to ensure they identify whether asbestos is contained in any of the materials and then handle them properly," Cllr Ward said.

When separating recyclable materials, please make sure there are no remnants of asbestos in those materials before you drop them off at Council's recycling centre.

Waste Services Manager David Hojem said that it could take just one asbestos fibre to "pollute" an entire load of recyclable materials at the recycling centre. Once this load is identified as containing asbestos, it then needs to be buried. This means that good recyclable material is buried as waste. "This is not good for recycling, not good for the environment, and not good for the life of our city's waste depot," Mr Hojem said.

If you are thinking of renovating or demolishing an old dwelling or shed, be aware of the presence of asbestos "remove the doubt and check it out."

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