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C1479212

27 June 2014

Mr Kieran Ferris

Dear Mr Ferris,

**RE: Loose-fill asbestos insulation in roofspace**

Council is writing to you because its records show your home has, or may previously have had, loose fill asbestos fibres in its ceiling cavity. This identification occurred through various investigations in the 1990's which were prompted from the installation of loose fill asbestos fibre ceiling installation in houses during the 1960's and 70's.

At the time of identification, letters were sent to property owners confirming the presence of asbestos insulation in the sample provided and recommending steps to contain fibres.

The inhalation of fibres from loose fill asbestos can have serious health consequences. The aim of this letter is to remind you about actions you can take to protect you, your family and tradespeople that may work on your house from potential exposure to this asbestos. This applies even if you have had the insulation material removed from your ceiling.

The NSW Department of Health has indicated that exposure to loose fill asbestos fibres is likely to be very low provided the asbestos is undisturbed and remains sealed off from the living areas.

It is therefore important that your home is well maintained to ensure the fibres do not reach the habitable areas of the house. It is likely that fibres have travelled down wall cavities and even into sub floor spaces where these interconnect with the ceiling space. This should be assumed unless you have evidence to the contrary, such as an asbestos report declaring all of these areas are free of asbestos fibres. Even in homes where the asbestos insulation material has been removed from the ceiling space there is still a high likelihood that asbestos fibres will be found in wall cavities and in underfloor areas where the home has a timber floor.

You or your family should not enter or disturb the roof, wall or floor cavities without appropriate protection and be mindful that access to these areas may generate airborne fibres that could enter into the liveable areas of the house.

Any cracks or holes that penetrate the ceiling, walls and floors have the potential to allow fibres into the living areas and should be repaired in a safe manner. This includes vents in walls, exhaust fans in ceilings, openings for lighting fixtures, maintenance on openings for power points and the like. If you are in doubt about the integrity of your living space, Council encourages you to obtain the services of a Licensed Asbestos Assessor or an Occupational Hygienist to carry out a building inspection. They will be able to advise you whether your living spaces are well sealed or appropriate actions to undertake to ensure this is the case.

Before any maintenance or renovation work is undertaken in areas that may contain asbestos including the ceiling, wall cavities or sub floor areas, asbestos should be identified and appropriate safe work practices developed. It is also critical that you tell any tradespeople performing work that you have or have had asbestos insulation in the house, otherwise there is a high likelihood that they will expose themselves and members of the household to fibres.

Council also recommend that an asbestos warning sticker be placed in the electrical meter box and on the manhole leading into the roofspace to alert any tradespeople who might attend your property.

Only appropriately qualified tradespeople with asbestos awareness training can work on any areas identified with asbestos. Removal of loose fill asbestos fibres may only be undertaken by a Class A licensed asbestos removalist.

You may be aware that future action on the management of loose asbestos fibres in homes has been very much in the news lately. At this stage Council continues to make representations to Federal and State Governments to provide assistance to resolve the issue in the long term. However, at this stage no resolution of how to solve this complex issue has been determined and no funding commitments have been made. Council will provide further advice when and if these issues progress further.

Council's records indicate that your postal address is different to the affected property address. A copy of this letter will therefore be forwarded to the occupier of the premises in approximately seven (7) days. You may wish to contact your tenant in the interim period.

Should you have any further enquiries please contact Council's Sustainability and Better Living Group on

Yours sincerely

M J THOMPSON  
Group Manager  
Sustainability & Better Living

Further information about how to manage asbestos in households can be found at the websites listed below:

[www.asbestosawareness.com.au](http://www.asbestosawareness.com.au) .

A list of licensed asbestos assessors and removalists in NSW can be obtained using the WorkCover asbestos and demolition licence holder search

<http://www.workcover.nsw.gov.au/online-searches/Pages/adl-search.aspx>

or by dialling WorkCover on 131050.

A list of Occupational Hygienists can be found at [www.aioh.org.au/consultantsearch](http://www.aioh.org.au/consultantsearch).

or in the enHealth publication *Asbestos: A guide for householders and the general public*, at:

[http://www.health.gov.au/internet/publications/publishing.nsf/Content/CA2578620005D57ACA2579FB0008A15F/\\$File/asbestos-feb13.pdf](http://www.health.gov.au/internet/publications/publishing.nsf/Content/CA2578620005D57ACA2579FB0008A15F/$File/asbestos-feb13.pdf)





# Friable "Mr Fluffy" Asbestos Insulation

## HOMEOWNER'S GUIDE

### Background

Asbestos refers to naturally occurring mineral silicates which were mined in Australia and around the world for its recognised properties of strength, durability, fireproofing and water proofing. Asbestos mining ceased in Australia in 1983 and is now banned from use.

From 1968 - 1979, loose fill, fluffy asbestos was sold by one Canberra firm known as "Mr Fluffy" as ceiling insulation for houses in Canberra and Queanbeyan, although there are reports of dwellings in other regional areas also containing the material.

Friable asbestos products are generally loose material which contains asbestos and is in a powder form or that can be crumbled, pulverized or reduced to a powder by hand pressure when dry. Friable asbestos products are dangerous because the asbestos fibres can get into the air very easily and may be inhaled by people living or working in the vicinity.

In 1989, the Commonwealth Government recognised the risk of this friable loose asbestos and conducted a survey of homes in the ACT erected prior to 1980. They found that 1.5% of homes built in the ACT before 1980 contained asbestos fluff insulation. An extensive Loose Asbestos Insulation Removal Program was then funded by the Commonwealth for those homes. This removal program was not offered in Queanbeyan or regional NSW. Based on the ACT statistics, it was estimated that a potential 60 homes in Queanbeyan could be, and remain, insulated with friable asbestos. It is unknown how many actually exist.

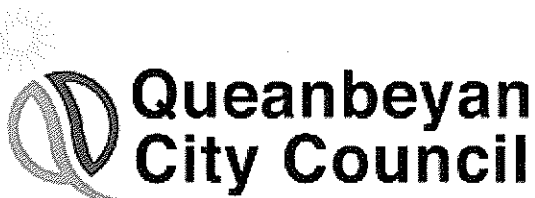
Between 1989 and 2009, Queanbeyan City Council positively identified 11 homes/buildings containing friable loose asbestos insulation. Testing of living areas in some of these homes was carried out in 1993 by the NSW Department of Health. The sampling found that asbestos fibres if left undisturbed, did not tend to escape into the living areas of the dwelling, provided the dwelling was structurally sound with no openings in walls and ceilings. As such, owners were advised to seal and restrict access to all roof space openings and label to prevent access through the manhole.

Although believed to be a safe option, this arrangement is not sustainable in the long term. The materials remain in the ceiling space, wall cavities and subfloor space of the building. Complete removal of asbestos from these areas in homes is virtually impossible.

### **How do I know if my home contains loose asbestos insulation?**

If you have concerns about loose insulation in your home, Council encourages home owners or prospective owners of properties built before 1980, to engage the services of a professional assessor. The specialist should undertake an "Asbestos Report" to check for all forms of asbestos in the home, including loose filled asbestos in their roof space. The assessor can provide specialist advice on the presence of this material and steps required to make it safe. This is most accurate way to find out if a building or structure contains asbestos. The asbestos inspection must be undertaken by a person competent in the identification and assessment of asbestos, such as an occupational hygienist (a competent person is defined by the NSW Work Health and Safety Regulation 2011).

The only definitive way to tell if loose material in the roof space is asbestos is through sample analysis under microscopic examination. It is easy to mistake as there are other forms of loose insulation material which do not present the same risks such as: rockwool, fiberglass or cellulose.



### **Can I renovate my home if it contains loose asbestos insulation?**

Home owners must not undertake any refurbishment work that requires alteration to any walls, ceilings, wall sockets or removal of cornices, no cabling (unless surface mounted) or additional sockets/outlets recessed in walls and avoid accessing subfloor areas until a further assessment under controlled conditions can be conducted. For demolition or redevelopment, any asbestos containing materials must be safely removed and disposed of prior to the work commencing. Only qualified tradespeople with asbestos awareness training can work on any areas identified with asbestos. Removal of loose-fill asbestos fibres may only be undertaken by a Class A licensed asbestos removalist.

### **How can I satisfy myself that my home is safe if loose asbestos is present?**

A licensed asbestos assessor or an occupational hygienist will be able to advise you whether your living spaces are well sealed and asbestos hazards are appropriately controlled.

### **Advice provided to home owners of houses that have been identified in Queanbeyan ?**

To minimise the risk to occupants of houses insulated with loose asbestos, the following measures are recommended:

- A. Removal of loose asbestos insulation material, by a contractor holding a current friable (Class A) asbestos removal licence issued by NSW WorkCover Authority; \* OR
- B. Containment of loose asbestos insulation material by effective and durable sealing.

### **What are the laws about disclosure of asbestos in homes?**

It's a buyer beware situation. Council's advice is that if your house was built before the 1980s than it should be specifically checked for loose filled asbestos as part of a building inspection report or specific Asbestos Report identifying all forms of asbestos on the property. A standard building report does not generally provide this information. You should specifically request that the report provide information on asbestos that may be present in the building.

There are requirements if a property is tenanted out. Property owners and agents are encouraged to inform any tenants or occupiers of the presence of asbestos and to address any potential asbestos hazards where appropriate. Property owners who let their properties out are required to identify any asbestos within those properties before any work is carried out (this includes residential properties). The Work Health and Safety Regulation 2011 states that the person conducting a business or undertaking in any building constructed before 31 December 2003 must identify if there is any asbestos in the building. All commercial properties that contain asbestos must have and maintain a current asbestos register and asbestos management plan.

### **Containment**

- All manholes should be sealed and signs erected indicating the presence of asbestos;
- All cracks in walls and ceilings should be sealed to prevent entry of asbestos fibres into the living areas;
- Any wall or ceiling vents or openings should be sealed, and any exhaust fans which discharge into the roof space should be disconnected and sealed.
- Any electrical, plumbing or other work in the roof space must be carried out by a qualified contractor, using approved personal and respiratory protection equipment, and observing safe work practices prescribed by WorkCover.
- No demolition, alteration or construction work shall be carried out until the asbestos has been removed by a contractor holding a current friable (Class A) asbestos removal licence issued by NSW WorkCover Authority.
- The local Fire Brigade and Emergency Services should be notified of all premises which contain loose asbestos roof insulation.

### *Who Can Help*

The only way to identify asbestos is by having a qualified specialist analyse it. A list of qualified companies can be found in the yellow pages listed under "Asbestos Removal & Treatment." Visit [www.asbestosawareness.com.au](http://www.asbestosawareness.com.au) to learn where asbestos might be found in your home and how to manage it safely. For more information about working with asbestos cement products, contact WorkCover's Information Centre on 131 050.