



Cleanup of storm damaged buildings: Protecting your health and environment

Cleaning up storm damaged buildings can create serious health and environmental hazards if simple safety procedures are not followed.

Householders should clean up carefully to prevent risks to their health and that of the community from exposure to asbestos, dangerous chemicals, toxic dust or particles of lead-based paint.

Buildings that have been damaged can produce a range of materials that may be hazardous including asbestos, chemicals such as cleaning and farm chemicals, excessive dust and particles such as flakes of lead-based paint.

If your house, sheds or other buildings have been damaged by storms, clean up carefully to prevent risks to your health and that of your community.

Asbestos

Buildings built before 1986 may contain some asbestos, such as cement sheeting ("AC sheet") used for walls or roofs, tiles, floor tiles, and flues.

Asbestos, if broken, damaged or cut, can be reduced to fine fibres that can become airborne. If the fine fibres are inhaled into the lungs, they can become a danger to health, with cancer being the major concern.

After a building has been damaged by storm, the amount of airborne asbestos is likely to be very low, as the fine particles from the site would mostly have been carried away by the winds at the time of the storm. However, fibres disturbed during excavation or cleanup of the site may be released into the air.

If you think that your damaged house or other buildings may have contained asbestos:

- Restrict access to the site to those wearing appropriate protective equipment.
- Try to keep the area damp to prevent fibres or dust being released into the air.

Despite the low risk, broken or damaged asbestos, and building debris that may contain asbestos, should be removed very carefully and disposed of at a landfill site approved to accept the waste.

Asbestos waste should be wetted down before collection, then wrapped securely in heavy duty 200µm thick plastic sheeting, or 200µm thick plastic bags for small fragments, before taking to the approved landfill. To locate an approved landfill site, contact your local Council or the Environment Protection Authority (EPA).

It is generally advised to employ a licensed contractor to remove asbestos from the home. However, you can do it yourself but you must comply with the Code of Practice for the Safe Removal of Asbestos (2nd Edition).



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Refer the 'Asbestos and the Home Renovator' booklet (available from Local Council or visit www.safework.sa.gov.au/uploaded_files/asbestos_homerenovator.pdf) for information on safe removal of asbestos material and correct personal protective equipment.

The Asbestos Regulations apply to workplaces including working farms and other places where people are employed.

A licensed asbestos removal contractor must carry out any asbestos removal at a worksite if the amount to be removed is greater than 0.5m² or more of friable asbestos, or 10m² or more of non-friable asbestos.

The asbestos must be removed by a licensed removalist, and transported in an EPA-approved vehicle.

To locate a licensed removalist, contact SafeWork SA on 8303-0405 or visit www.safework.sa.gov.au/

Lead

Lead can produce a range of health problems particularly in young children. Lead is a highly toxic metal and older homes may contain lead-based paint.

Disturbance or removal of materials containing lead-based paint may result in elevated levels of lead dust in the air which could then be breathed into the body.

When repairing storm damage, take care to minimise dust and take precautions when stripping old paint that may contain lead.

Precautions include:

- wearing a face mask;
- rubbing down wet using waterproof sandpaper or use chemical stripper (if a chemical stripper is used ensure adequate information is obtained on its safe use);

- washing hands thoroughly after working, especially before eating;
- disposing of paint debris safely—vacuum where possible.

General cleanup advice

Before entering any building, make an assessment of whether there is any structural damage that poses a risk of collapse or falling objects.

Take care when entering buildings because there may be physical and chemical hazards or damage to electrical or gas services. Inspect the immediate area thoroughly before attempting to recover items from any damaged buildings or structures.

Wear sturdy footwear to protect against any hazards such as broken glass and be careful if you are using unfamiliar machinery.

Sturdy protective clothing should be worn such as overalls with long sleeves. Carefully remove clothing after cleaning up and launder separately.

If entering a very dusty area, wear a particulate "P2" face-mask, obtainable at hardware stores or safety equipment suppliers, to reduce irritation from breathing in dust.

Be particularly careful when handling building waste if you think asbestos or lead-based paint was present in the damaged building.

DO NOT bury asbestos waste or other building waste on your property, or in nearby gullies, etc. It may contaminate the land and cause harm at a later time.

Burning of waste materials should also be avoided particularly as it can produce additional health hazards from the vapours, smoke, and residue.

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Further information

- If you have any concerns about your health you should discuss them with your doctor.
- For advice on how to safely handle asbestos or other information about asbestos contact SafeWork SA on 8303-0405 or visit:
www.safework.sa.gov.au
- Refer to 'Asbestos and the Home Renovator' at:
www.safework.sa.gov.au/uploaded_files/asbestos_homerenovator.pdf
- For information about transport and disposal of asbestos and other building materials, contact the EPA Office during business hours on 8204-2004; country callers - freecall 1800 623 445 or go to:
www.epa.sa.gov.au
- For health information on any hazardous substance contact Environmental Health (details below)

Contact

Environmental Health
Public Health
SA Health

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