



ACT Heritage Council

General Conservation Policy 6

LOOSE FILL ASBESTOS IN HERITAGE PLACES

BACKGROUND

There are often many types of asbestos in Canberra homes. This can include bonded asbestos, asbestos lagging as well as loose-fill asbestos. Renovations or similar work can disturb the asbestos causing fibres to be released and the potential for exposure increases. Households are encouraged to undertake an asbestos assessment. An asbestos assessment needs to be done by a licensed assessor. A list of assessors can be found on the Environment and Planning Directorate website.

In February 2014 the ACT Government wrote to more than 1000 households that were part of the Commonwealth loose-fill asbestos insulation removal program. The ACT Government's Asbestos Taskforce has also recently (July 2014) written to more than 1000 homes that are on the ACT Government's list as known to be affected by loose fill asbestos insulation.

From 1968 to 1979, pure loose-fill asbestos was sold predominantly by one local company ('Mr Fluffy') as ceiling insulation for residential and commercial premises in Canberra. This insulation is particularly problematical because it is raw asbestos. In effect, it is mined asbestos (which is fibrous by nature) that has been crushed into a fine state and installed as insulation. This means it is easy to disturb and fibres can become airborne and easily inhaled or ingested.

While there is evidence to suggest that this form of insulation was used in other Australian jurisdictions (and parts of the world), the extent of its use as a form of residential home insulation in the ACT, and the subsequent removal program, is considered unique.

The ACT Heritage Council (the Council) understands that loose fill asbestos remains in some buildings. It has been advised that to ensure the safety of the occupants and other users of buildings where loose fill asbestos is present in cavities such as the ceiling space, wall cavities and sub-floor spaces, it is necessary to ensure that all openings including cracks, wall vents, ceiling vents, electrical fittings and sub-floor vents are completely sealed and that all seals must be maintained. Additionally, any new cracks or openings that may occur due to events such as earthquakes and normal shrinkage and swelling of clay soils will need to be sealed.

POLICY

Where a report from a licensed asbestos assessor identifies the presence of loose-fill asbestos in a building at a heritage place, the Council will not object to the demolition of the building subject to the following:

1. archival recording of the building exterior is undertaken;
2. any replacement construction conforms to any relevant heritage guidelines for the heritage place; and
3. where no heritage guidelines exist for the heritage place, the design of any replacement construction will be subject to discussion with the Council.

Advice on the design of replacement construction may be obtained from ACT Heritage. Please contact ACT Heritage on 13 22 81.