



Monitoring Asbestos in Air Levels After Removal of Decorative Coatings

Introduction

An enquiry has been received about the need for clearance monitoring after the removal of decorative coatings in a private residential setting. The task was undertaken by a certified operator and in accordance with the general requirements of the OSH asbestos guidelines.

Comment: Where a certified operator undertakes this work at the request of the homeowner the full requirements of the OSH guidelines apply as part of taking “all practicable steps” under the Health and Safety in Employment Act 1992. This includes both a visual inspection of the completed job and clearance monitoring prior to re-occupation. Where a homeowner chooses to do this work themselves in their home the requirements should still be adhered to for maximum safety of themselves and family.

Work Procedures

Removal procedures for decorative coatings containing asbestos will generate some asbestos dust. The amount will vary according to the work methods used. Precautions are required to prevent the release of airborne fibres into other parts of the residence. These precautions will usually take the

form of sealing around doors and windows between rooms. Placing plastic covering on the floor (and around the walls if necessary) and creating a negative air pressure in the room being worked. Utilising a vacuum cleaner to discharge air from within the room (via a HEPA¹ filter) to the outside may achieve this in a smallish room. Larger rooms will require a larger HEPA extraction ventilation unit. The work procedure used must ensure that the product being removed is kept wet by water spray. This will suppress dust production, as will the method of removal. Scraping the material into a container held up near ceiling level rather than letting it fall to the floor will prevent excessive dust being generated. To ensure a thorough wetting the water used in the spray must have a wetting agent added such as detergent. When all of these processes have been carried out the amount of dust generated by the removal process will be significantly reduced.

Visual Inspections and Clearance Monitoring

The objective of the visual inspection and clearance monitoring is to provide assurance that the job has been completed to a high standard and that the possibility of future exposure to asbestos

¹ High efficiency particulate air filter which retains asbestos fibres.

fibres has been minimised. After the job has been completed, a period of time (not less than 3 hours) should be allowed to ensure that dust has settled or has been removed by the negative air system. Finally, a thorough cleaning down of the walls and ceilings, by wet wiping and vacuuming the floor (HEPA) after the plastic has been removed, will ensure that any fibres adhering to these surfaces will be removed. To assist with clearance of fibres from the air the negative air unit should be run for some hours after this cleaning.

For residential work done by a contractor, the certified removalist must arrange for clearance monitoring because this requirement cannot be placed on the home owner as they are not a principal.

(Note: this variation from the OSH guidelines does not apply to commercial removal work in other situations.)

For the clearance monitoring process to be meaningful in residential situations the removal contractor must ensure that a thorough visual inspection reveals no obvious evidence of residual asbestos-containing material. When this has been confirmed, monitoring can commence after the negative air has been switched off. At least two sampling pumps should be used for a normal sized room. Larger rooms may require more. The sample should be collected over a 4-hour period at a sampling rate of 2 litres per minute. An experienced person trained by the approved laboratory, should collect samples in accordance with accepted practice and send them for analysis. The clearance will be confirmed when a result of less than or equal to 0.01 fibres/ml is achieved.