

December 2025

Information for workplaces on asbestos in coloured sand

WorkSafe New Zealand is providing this information for workplaces in relation to asbestos in coloured sand.

Until further notice, coloured sand listed on the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment's (MBIE) [Product Safety](#) webpage must be presumed to contain asbestos. Contact MBIE for further details regarding product identification. Workplaces where these coloured sand products are stored or used must take appropriate precautions.

Immediate advice for workplaces

Based on testing results to date and the fact that the recalled sand products are easily crumbled by hand, we must treat these products as being friable asbestos containing material. This means a Class A removal process is required, followed by a Class A clearance inspection.

If the sand is in a sealed container, move it to a secure location away from people. Do not open it.

If the sand has been opened in your workplace:

- instruct everyone to leave the area and relocate to a sand-free, well-ventilated area
- make sure the sand is not accessible
- do not attempt to clean it up
- contact a licensed asbestos assessor or removalist for immediate advice and support on your specific situation – [Asbestos licence holders register](#)
- do not return to the affected area until the extent of contamination is understood, and after the area has appropriate clearance.

Decontamination requirements

Contact a licensed asbestos assessor or Class A licensed asbestos removalist who can provide decontamination services and assist with personal decontamination.

All clothing worn during exposure must be disposed of as asbestos waste.

[Asbestos licence holders register](#)

Assessment and monitoring

The workplace must undergo perimeter sampling to determine the extent of cross-contamination.

Benchmark air monitoring should be conducted by an independent licensed asbestos assessor.

[Asbestos licence holders register](#)

Removal and clearance

Removal of the used coloured sand from workplaces is a notifiable Class A work. A Class A removal process is required, followed by a Class A clearance inspection.

Only solid, non-porous items such as metal, plastic, glass and lacquered wood may be salvaged after decontamination. All other items must be disposed of as asbestos waste by a Class A licensed removalist.

The workplace (or affected areas) cannot be reoccupied until a Class A clearance certificate is issued by an independent licensed assessor.

For education facilities and health facilities, removal work may start immediately. Removalists must still notify this work to asbestos@worksafe.govt.nz and within 24 hours [report asbestos removal](#) online.

For Class A removal at other types of workplaces, starting this work immediately will depend on the specific circumstances and whether contaminated areas can be effectively isolated from access. In such cases, please seek advice by emailing technical@worksafe.govt.nz

[Managing and removing asbestos](#)
[Asbestos licence holders register](#)

Unused and unopened sand containers

Unused and unopened sand containers must be isolated by the businesses or duty holders and safely disposed of.

WorkSafe strongly recommends engaging a Class A licensed asbestos removalist for disposal. These professionals are trained to comply with local bylaws and the Resource Management Act. They can also manage any damage to sand tubes during handling, packaging, and labelling.

Workplace health advice

Organisations and workers concerned about potential asbestos exposure should consult an occupational medicine physician or equivalent specialist. They are best equipped to assess, educate, and support workers who may have exposed to asbestos-related health risks.

For further guidance, we recommend the following resources:

- [Occupational Medicine Experts](#)
- Find an occupational health and wellbeing professional [Australian and New Zealand Society of Occupational Medicine](#)
- [Exposure monitoring and health monitoring – guidance for businesses](#)

WorkSafe action

WorkSafe has identified the key importers and distributors of coloured sand in New Zealand and is urgently conducting on-site visits to assess their systems for isolating the product and managing asbestos risks. We'll also be visiting a selection of retailers across the country to ensure they're managing their risks to keep workers and others healthy and safe. Any notifications of unsafe work will be swiftly and thoroughly followed up.

WorkSafe is working with workplaces as they grapple with a quickly evolving situation. We are also actively providing advice and guidance into the cross-agency response coordination. Enforcement is not our priority at this stage. However, we may act where we believe a person or organisation is deliberately flouting requirements and endangering people.

Further information

You can access a list of independent, licensed asbestos assessors and removalists on the [Asbestos licence holder register](#)

They can provide decontamination services and assist with personal decontamination.

If you have further questions relating to this issue, please contact technical@worksafe.govt.nz

To engage independent, licensed asbestos assessors and removalists:

- [Asbestos licence holder register](#)

To let us know about an unsafe or unhealthy work situation that could lead to a death or serious injury or illness:

- [Raise a health or safety concern](#) or
- call 0800 030 040.

For public health concerns and advice:

- call Healthline on 0800 611 116, or
- visit [Asbestos and your health](#)

For information about the product recalls:

- call Product Safety on 0508 426 678, or
- visit [Product Safety](#)

For advice for schools and early education centres, contact the Ministry of Education:

- call 0800 323 323, or
- visit [Asbestos in coloured sand](#)

Questions and answers

How did WorkSafe find out about this issue?

WorkSafe New Zealand was informed on 6 November 2025 by a Director of the Faculty of Asbestos Management of Australia and New Zealand (FAMANZ), who is also a Ministry of Education (MoE) staff member but was acting in a personal capacity when they became aware of (and subsequently informed WorkSafe of) the contaminated coloured sand issue emerging in Australia. WorkSafe immediately alerted the Australian workplace health and safety authorities to this matter.

WorkSafe then reached out to MoE's asbestos team on Friday 7 November to confirm the initial information due to its potential impacts on educational facilities with the product. At this stage, it was still unconfirmed whether the product in question was in New Zealand, which is why the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) (from a product safety perspective) was not yet looped in on this issue.

Once confirmed that the product was in New Zealand, WorkSafe informed MBIE and Health New Zealand on 11 November 2025 to support a coordinated response together with MoE.

How do I know if my sand is part of the issue?

Until further notice, coloured sand products listed on MBIE's [Product Safety](#) webpage must be presumed to contain asbestos. Contact MBIE for further details regarding product identification at this time. Workplaces where these coloured sand products are stored or used must take appropriate precautions.

Recall advice and information for consumers who have purchased this product were published as soon as the details of the process were confirmed with the suppliers. Full instructions are available on MBIE's [Product Safety](#) webpage.

For further advice regarding product identification, contact the MBIE Consumer line – 0508 426 678.

What is WorkSafe doing regarding this situation?

WorkSafe has identified key importers and distributors of the coloured sand in New Zealand and is conducting on-site visits to assess their systems for isolating the product and managing asbestos risks.

Our inspectors are conducting random assessments at retailers, prioritising sensitive purchasers such as hospitals, libraries and youth clubs. Our focus is on information gathering to establish the scope of the issue, making sure duty holders are well-informed about how to identify and manage any potential asbestos contamination, and sharing information and expertise with agencies to meet the needs of the wider public. Any notifications of unsafe work will be swiftly and thoroughly followed up.

We have informed licensed asbestos removalists of this issue. The decision on when to engage with asbestos removalists rests with the respective schools, businesses and households.

Our involvement at this stage is purely to engage, as workplaces grapple with a quickly evolving situation. We are taking a pragmatic, proactive, and proportionate approach. We are also actively providing advice and guidance into the cross-agency response coordination. We will only be involved from an enforcement perspective if there is evidence of asbestos disposal where guidance is knowingly disregarded, which may put others at risk.

Why is the workplace and household advice for containment and disposal of the contaminated product different?

Asbestos advice for households and workplaces are different because the rules aren't the same.

Businesses and organisations have health and safety obligations under the law and are required to manage their health and safety risks in line with legislation or specific regulations, such as asbestos regulations.

Within a household, people are likely to have used this product in smaller quantities and in a wide range of ways, leading to different levels of risk.

We need to take a proportionate approach to the risk and provide households with advice that provides practical steps for reducing the risk of exposure immediately. That is based on the advice on the Health New Zealand website.

If individual households feel they have a large quantity of this product in the house that may need professional help to handle, we suggest they contact MBIE at 0508 426 678 for further advice.

For household health advice regarding this issue, please refer to [Health New Zealand](#)

Asbestos removalists on the WorkSafe website have two license classes. Which one do people need to engage?

We are treating this as a Class A matter, so only Class A licensed asbestos removalists are allowed to remove contaminated sand. These removalists have the training and equipment needed to safely dispose of asbestos waste, and they follow local rules and the Resource Management Act.

They are also responsible for taking action if any containers are damaged during handling, packaging, or labelling of the sand tubs.

How can employers manage the health of their staff who may have been exposed to asbestos?

We recommend engaging an occupational medicine physician or similar to provide advice as to the best approach to provide education and support and assess the health risks to your workers.

An occupational doctor is a medical doctor or medical specialist, who is trained and experienced in the effects of work on health and health on work. They can work with organisations and employees to provide advice. They can also assist with the development and implementation of health monitoring (surveillance) programs to monitor the health status of workers exposed to occupational hazards.

While WorkSafe is unable to recommend a specific occupational physician or specialist, concerned employers can refer to the following links to the Health Pages directory website that lists Occupational Health physicians and the Professional Australia and New Zealand register of Occupational Physicians:

- [Occupational Medicine Experts](#)
- Find an occupational health and wellbeing professional [Australian and New Zealand Society of Occupational Medicine](#)
- We also have relevant advice on the WorkSafe website [Exposure monitoring and health monitoring – guidance for businesses](#)