

Asbestos bags used as carpet underlay and pipe lagging

This Alert highlights concerns with hessian bags, previously used to transport asbestos, being used in carpet underlay and pipe lagging.

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Background

There have been various media reports concerning hessian bags, previously used to transport asbestos, being recycled to make carpet underlay and pipe lagging.

Hessian bags were used to transport asbestos from Wittenoom to Perth between 1950 and the early 1970s. Many of these bags were then recycled and used in the manufacture of carpet underlay and pipe lagging.

It is not known whether these types of carpet underlay and pipe lagging were used in Victoria. If they were used, many of them may have already been removed and replaced with renovations and maintenance.

Carpet underlay or pipe lagging, made from hessian bags potentially contaminated with asbestos, is likely to be brown in colour and look like a fibrous mat. The carpet underlay may also be significantly compacted due to 30 years plus of wear.



The carpet underlay may look similar to above picture (courtesy of Department of Health, Western Australia).

Control measures

WorkSafe Victoria expects that when removal or repair work involving carpet underlay or pipe lagging is undertaken, the following safety steps are followed:

1. Before commencing any removal or repair work, consider whether the carpet underlay or pipe lagging may contain asbestos contaminated hessian bags. For example, was the carpet underlay/pipe lagging installed prior to 1980?
2. If yes, arrange for a competent person (ie a person with training, experience and knowledge in identifying

asbestos containing material and able to determine risk and appropriate controls) to visually inspect the carpet underlay or pipe lagging. For more information on competence of people identifying asbestos, refer to WorkSafe's Compliance Code, *Managing asbestos in workplaces*.

3. If, as a result of steps 1 and 2, the carpet underlay or pipe lagging is suspected to contain hessian bags, you may either assume asbestos to be present or confirm this by arranging a competent person to take a sample and have it analysed by a laboratory accredited by the National Association of Testing Authorities (NATA). A list of accredited laboratories is available at nata.asn.au
4. Where asbestos is assumed or confirmed to be present in the carpet underlay or pipe lagging, you must arrange for its removal using a 'Class A' asbestos removal contractor. See WorkSafe's Compliance Code, *Removing asbestos in workplaces* for more information. A list of licensed 'Class A' removalists is available at worksafe.vic.gov.au
5. The area can only be reoccupied once asbestos containing material has been removed and a clearance certificate by a competent person (must be independent from the asbestos removal contractor) has been issued. The clearance certificate must state the asbestos removal area (and the area surrounding it) has been cleared of asbestos and is safe to be reoccupied.

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Contact details

Call us on: 1800 136 089

Email us at: info@worksafe.vic.gov.au

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