



Asbestos: If in doubt, get it inspected says NATA this National Asbestos Awareness Week

21st November, Sydney – Today marks the start of National Asbestos Awareness Week, as The National Association of Testing Authorities (NATA) is reminding Australians that asbestos could be anywhere in your house and workplace if it was built before 1990.

There remain 6.4 million tonnes of asbestos across Australia. One in three houses are likely to include asbestos, whether in the eaves, the roof, tile backing or even in your doghouse.

Neil Shepherd, Sector Manager for Life Sciences at NATA said: “You cannot see respirable asbestos fibres with the naked eye meaning there’s only one way to be confident and safe around asbestos and that’s to get it identified by a professional from an accredited organisation.”

The theme for this year’s awareness week is around not cutting corners and disposing of asbestos in the right way. Over 6,000 tonnes are illegally dumped each year which causes potentially hazardous consequences for the environment with the Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency estimating the clean-up costs at \$11.2m annually. To prevent the clean up before it escalates, ASEA recommends getting an accredited professional to inspect and then test the materials in your home before starting any renovations.

Julia Collins, Director of Research, Data and Policy at the Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency (ASEA) said: “Our research shows that people mostly know that asbestos is dangerous, but do not have a good understanding of where asbestos can be found in the home and how they can protect themselves. The problem is most of us cannot tell if a material contains asbestos just by looking at it. So each year we remind people to *‘Think twice about asbestos’* and this message is also targeted at tradies to not take short cuts when it comes to asbestos. We always encourage people to engage accredited asbestos professionals for all inspection and testing activities.”

Shepherd who has spent 25+ years specialising in lab accreditation for testing, added: “If you are renovating a house built before 1990 or are in any doubt as to whether asbestos could be present, please call an accredited facility that can offer an expert who has been independently confirmed as competent for the identification of asbestos”.

Australia banned the use, transport and supply of asbestos in 2003. At the same time an import prohibition for asbestos, and goods containing asbestos, was enacted to complement the ban.

The Australian Border Force (ABF) is responsible for enforcing Australia's import prohibition for asbestos.

ABF A/g Assistant Secretary Alison Neil said the ABF worked closely with the Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency, which can issue import and export permits in limited circumstances.

“Australia is one of the few countries in the Asia/Pacific region that has a comprehensive ban on all six types of asbestos. However, through NATA’s accreditation agreement with other countries globally (ILAC MRA), importers are able to have their products inspected and tested by an accredited facility in the country of origin. Provided the test report meets Australian requirements, it can then be used to provide assurance of no asbestos content for the goods at the border,” Ms Neil said.

The [ABF website](#) provides information and examples of risk items for asbestos, along with images of border detections. Asbestos has been found in imported items such as vintage cars, building

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products, bee smokers and cut stone used to manufacture items such as vanity sinks and bench tops, which can contain varying levels of naturally occurring asbestos.

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A Global Burden of Disease study estimates that around 4,400 Australians died from asbestos-related diseases in 2019, four times more than the annual road toll. The lag time of the effects of asbestos can be decades so there is an important need for assurance in the processes we have in place to deal with scenarios where asbestos may be present.

According to ASEA, 21% of all hazardous waste contains asbestos which is why it is using 2022 National Asbestos Awareness Week to shine a spotlight on the disposal of asbestos.

NATA is a not-for-profit member organisation, with over 100 laboratories and facilities that are accredited for the inspection of asbestos. To find a member who's results you can rely on please visit nata.com.au.

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Notes to editors

For further information please contact: liam.fitzpatrick@nata.com.au

About NATA

National Association of Testing Authorities (NATA) provides accreditation for laboratories to ensure testing results can be relied on and trusted. As Australia's sole internationally recognised accreditation authority, NATA's role is to uphold the national standards of technical competence for those delivering products or services to the general public. Through its extensive network, NATA provides assessment, accreditation and training services to laboratories and technical facilities.