



28 August 2009

Asbestos in Carpet Underlay

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Is my carpet underfelt likely to contain dangerous asbestos fibres?

A: No this is very unlikely. Carpet underlay made and installed since the mid 1970s was generally made from synthetic or natural materials that would not contain or have been contaminated with asbestos.

There is a slight possibility that some older felt-style underlay manufactured and installed prior to the early 1970s may have incorporated material sourced from hessian bags that were used to transport raw asbestos from mine sites to processing plants.

Q: Does all underlay installed prior to the 1970s contain asbestos?

A: No. In 2006, the Environmental Health Directorate of the Department of Health and Asbestos Diseases Society tested a number of samples of underlay believed to have been installed around Perth prior to 1970. None of the samples contained asbestos fibres. However, the number of samples from this era available for testing has been low, so EHD is cautious about suggesting that there is absolutely no risk. The average expected life of a good quality carpet is around 20 years, so it is unlikely that many homes still have carpet and underlay dating back to before the early 1970s.

Q: Am I at risk and do I need to do anything if I have an old carpet/underfelt in my home?

A: There is no evidence that people are at risk if the underfelt remains undisturbed underneath the carpet.

Q: Do I need to take precautions if I want to remove carpet and underlay installed prior to 1970?

A: Yes, it would be advisable to wear a Class P1 or P2 disposable facemask (available at most hardware outlets) and disposable overalls if you are intending to remove old carpet and underfelt. This would provide protection against inhaling dust and other allergens as well as any asbestos fibres in the unlikely event that they are present. Underlay should be carefully removed to minimise release of dust.

Alternatively, residents may wish to engage a professional carpet layer to have their carpet and underlay removed and replaced.





Q: Can I continue to vacuum my carpet?

A: Yes, but if you believe that your carpet and underlay were installed prior to the early 1970s and are concerned it would be advisable to have a sample of the underlay tested for the presence of asbestos fibres before continuing to vacuum. The Department of Health (contact details provided below) can provide further advice about testing laboratories.

Q: Should I be concerned if I have old hessian bags in my possession?

A: Old hessian bags marked as having contained asbestos should be treated as any other asbestos-contaminated material and handled and disposed of in accordance with the Health (Asbestos) Regulations 1992. It is not known whether asbestos was also transported in unlabelled hessian bags, so these should also be treated as potentially contaminated and disposed of appropriately unless the source and prior use of the bags is known.

If a resident has such bags they should be carefully wrapped in plastic or placed into plastic bags, sealed and labeled with the words - CAUTION ASBESTOS and taken to a waste facility that accepts asbestos. For advice on location of waste facilities, residents can contact their local government or refer to the following website.

<http://www.dec.wa.gov.au/pollution-prevention/controlled-wastes/publications.html>

Q: Where can I get further advice or assistance?

A: The Environmental Health Directorate is keen to test more samples of underlay that was installed prior to the early 1970s. Please contact the Directorate on 9388 4999 to arrange to have a sample of underfelt tested if you believe it to be from this era.

More information is also available at the Department of health's website at:

http://www.public.health.wa.gov.au/cproot/1365/2/Asbestos_Carpet_Underlay.pdf.

