

North Sydney Public School

Frequently asked questions | June 2022

The health, safety and wellbeing of students, staff and the community are always the Department of Education and School Infrastructure NSW's (SINSW) highest priority. We acknowledge even the smallest traces of asbestos can be an unsettling experience for our school communities.

This frequently asked questions document is intended to provide information to parents and carers about how we are managing the safe excavation, storage and removal of soils which contain asbestos materials from the works zone.

When were suspected asbestos containing materials found within the works zone?

Site investigations including bore hole testing were undertaken in January 2022. These investigations indicated that asbestos containing materials (ACM) were likely to be found during excavation works.

From Wednesday 18 to Friday 20 May 2022, during excavation works for the new Building I, the contractor identified fragments of suspected ACM within some excavated soils. These soils were separated and securely covered with geofabric until further testing could take place.

When was the stockpile of soil confirmed to contain ACM?

On Tuesday 24 May 2022, SINSW received the laboratory test results confirming the soil contained fragments of ACM. No other contaminants were identified within the soil samples.

What safety measures were in place during excavation works?

All excavation works are completed in accordance with the Department of Education's Asbestos Management Plan and SafeWork NSW regulations. This includes a site specific Remediation Action Plan detailing the steps we need to take for the safe storage and removal of contaminated soils.

The site specific Remediation Action Plan is overseen by an Independent Occupational Hygienist who reviews our contractor's actions to ensure they are compliant with the SafeWork NSW Code of Practice for the removal of asbestos. The following control measures were implemented during the excavation works:

- three air monitors were installed prior to excavation works starting
- excavated soils were kept wet at all times in order to contain it
- soils containing suspected ACM were separated into a stockpile and covered with geofabric.

These control measures will continue to be in place for all future excavation works.

There are two stockpiles of dirt on the site. Do both contain asbestos?

No, only the stockpile securely covered with geofabric contains asbestos containing materials. The other, larger stockpile in the works zone is clear of contamination. The two stockpiles are separated in order to protect the clean soil from contamination, as per the approved Asbestos Management Plan.

How was the air monitoring carried out and what are the results?

The air monitoring was carried out by an Independent Occupational Hygienist in accordance with the requirements of SafeWork Australia Section 3.11 'How to Safely Remove Asbestos Code of Practice', and the 'Guidance Note on the Membrane Filter Method for Estimating Airborne Asbestos Fibres' 2nd edition'.

The Independent Occupational Hygienist has advised that all air monitoring conducted to date has returned results below the minimum detection limit (i.e. <0.01fibres/mL). Air monitoring reports can be made available to parents on request.

For more information contact:

School Infrastructure NSW

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Is the school safe to occupy?

Yes. The Independent Occupational Hygienist has advised that all required air monitoring conducted to date has returned results below the minimum detection limit and all control measures are in place to secure the stockpile.

Air monitoring and regular visual inspections by the Independent Occupational Hygienist will continue throughout the project.

How and when will the asbestos containing materials be removed from the works zone?

Removal of the waste materials will take place progressively from 4 June 2022 on Saturdays only. These works will take place outside of school hours with safety precautions in place, including air monitoring. The material will be securely covered and kept moist during transport. The material will be removed offsite and disposed at a landfill that can lawfully receive asbestos waste.

The contaminated soils will be removed in accordance with the Department of Education's Asbestos Management Plan and SafeWork NSW regulations. All work will be completed by licensed and accredited asbestos contractors, and monitored by the Independent Occupational Hygienist in strict accordance with all applicable legislation, regulations, policies and guidelines.

Following remediation, the Independent Occupational Hygienist will issue a clearance certificate before construction work continues in this area of the construction site.

Does the SafeWork NSW Code of Practice require removal works to take place outside of school hours?

There is no requirement under the SafeWork NSW Code of Practice 'How To Safely Remove Asbestos' to only remove asbestos outside of school hours. We have requested this additional control procedure as a precautionary measure to provide additional reassurance to the school community.

Is there likely to be other finds of asbestos in the construction zone?

Yes. As excavation works for new Building's I and J are not yet complete, we anticipate more asbestos containing materials will be found. All subsequent finds will be handled following the same Asbestos Management Plan, Safe Work NSW Code of Practice and the site specific Remediation Action Plan.

Why is an Independent Occupational Hygienist contracted for this work?

An Independent Occupational Hygienist is contracted to ensure the health and wellbeing of the school community and workers. The hygienist ensures all asbestos related control measures are in place and works are carried out as per the SafeWork NSW Code of Practice and the Asbestos Management Plan. Following the completion of the asbestos removal, they carry out a visual inspection and review air monitoring results to ensure there are no traces of asbestos remaining in the works zone. Once satisfied, the hygienist issues an asbestos Clearance Certificate which confirms the area is free from contaminants and the works zone is safe and can be returned to normal occupation.

How common is asbestos in our community?

In the past, asbestos was a common building material. During the 1980s, asbestos cement materials were phased out. From 31 December 2003, the Australian Government placed a total ban on the manufacture, use, reuse, import, transport, storage or sale of all forms of asbestos.

Environmental weathering of asbestos-cement sheets in roofing and wall cladding, and disturbance of asbestos from building materials like insulation, ceiling, and floor tiles results in asbestos fibres being widespread in the environment.

Asbestos fibres are widely present in the built and natural environment and as such no location, including schools, shopping centres or homes can be completely free of asbestos fibres.

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