

PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET

No. 114

POTENTIAL HEALTH RISK TO NEIGHBOURS FROM A FIRE DAMAGED BUILDING THAT CONTAINS ASBESTOS

WHAT IS THE POTENTIAL HEALTH RISK FROM FIRE DAMAGED BUILDINGS CONTAINING ASBESTOS?

Asbestos dust and fibres have the potential to present a health risk during and after a fire. The presence of asbestos in ash and rubble does not pose a health risk itself, however airborne asbestos fibres may pose a risk to those inhaling them. The use of water or foam in controlling a fire helps prevent fibres from becoming airborne.

WILL NEIGHBOURING PROPERTIES BE AFFECTED BY A FIRE INVOLVING ASBESTOS?

The possibility of neighbours being exposed to asbestos fibres is generally very low, however precautions should be taken to minimise the release of asbestos dust and fibres during clean-up. As a precautionary measure if you are clearing burned material in or around your property, you should dampen down the material and wear a dust mask and protective clothing.

Wipe dusty surfaces with a damp cloth and use a low pressure hose on a spray configuration to remove visible dust from pathways. Cloths should be disposed of in the rubbish.

Outdoor furniture or play equipment should be washed down before use to remove any dust that has settled on it.

IS THERE A RISK IF I HAVE BREATHED IN SOME DUST THAT POSSIBLY CONTAINS ASBESTOS?

While some asbestos is present in some of the dust and ash from destroyed homes, the levels are not high and the large size of the asbestos fibres released from asbestos sheets means there is only a very low risk of it causing disease.

WHAT SORT OF MASKS SHOULD I WEAR DURING CLEAN UP?

A correctly fitting P1 rated dust mask will provide protection from dust including low levels of asbestos. Damp tea towels or cloths across the nose and mouth will also provide adequate protection, especially for babies or people who can't wear masks.

- P1 rated masks are available from hardware stores.
- Wash hands before removing masks.
- The masks can be re-used until they no longer fit properly or become visibly clogged or blocked.
- Used masks should be placed in plastic bags and disposed of in the rubbish.

Seek medical advice if you have any health concerns.