

Workplace Health and Safety Queensland

Asbestos flooring

Purpose

This fact sheet provides information regarding asbestos backed vinyl sheet flooring and vinyl tiles containing asbestos.

What is asbestos backed vinyl sheet flooring?

Asbestos backed vinyl sheet flooring is where the 'backing' (the side attached to the floor—see Figure 1) contains friable (easily broken) asbestos material.



Figure 1 - Asbestos backed vinyl sheet flooring

The vinyl sheeting itself does not contain asbestos, however, manufacturers sometimes incorporated a felt-like 'backing' for cushioning purposes. It is this backing which contains asbestos (typically 80–100 per cent).

Usually applied in sheet form, a lot of asbestos backed vinyl sheet flooring had a 'terrazzo' type (colourful marble or stone chip – see Figure 2) pattern look on the surface. It is most commonly found in buildings constructed before the mid-1980s.



Figure 2 – Terrazzo type asbestos backed vinyl sheet flooring.

What is the risk of exposure from asbestos backed vinyl sheet flooring?

As the asbestos backing is sealed from the atmosphere by the overlaying vinyl, the risk of exposure to airborne fibres from asbestos backed vinyl sheet flooring is low unless the vinyl material is damaged or disturbed.

Minor defects such as cracks, peeling or small worn patches in the surface vinyl will generally not cause asbestos to become airborne. However, asbestos backed vinyl sheet flooring with such minor defects must not be subject to mechanical abrasion as such activities may cause further deterioration.

In cases where vinyl sheet flooring has been damaged to the extent where the asbestos containing material on the underside is disturbed, a hazard assessment must be undertaken by a competent person to assess what control measures must be implemented to control any risk. For more information on a competent person, refer to the fact sheet—*Identifying and recording asbestos in the workplace*.

Where asbestos backed vinyl sheet flooring is to be removed, it must only be removed by an A Class certificate holder in accordance with the *Workplace Health and Safety Regulation 2008*. The removal of asbestos backed vinyl sheet flooring must be performed in accordance with the *Code of Practice for the Safe Removal of Asbestos 2nd edition*.

What are asbestos containing vinyl tiles?

Asbestos vinyl tiles contain 8–30 per cent asbestos in a tightly bonded matrix (see Figure 3). They do not have a 'backing' and are usually glued directly to the floor. It should be noted that glue used to adhere the asbestos vinyl tiles to the floor may also contain asbestos.



Figure 3 – Asbestos vinyl tiles © Worksafe Victoria

What is the risk of exposure from asbestos containing vinyl tiles?

Exposure to asbestos from asbestos containing vinyl tiles that are in good condition is thought to be very low.

Floor care treatment systems that include the use of a sealant over which the finish coats are applied should be used on asbestos containing vinyl tiles. Two or more layers of sealant should be applied as a base coat followed by one or more layers of a high percentage solids finish.

Spray buffing or dry burnishing should only be performed on floors that have sufficient finish so that the pad cannot contact the underlying asbestos vinyl tile.

There are certain activities which are prohibited:

- using power tools with an abrasive mechanism to clean asbestos containing materials
- using high pressure spray equipment (e.g. water blasting) to clean asbestos containing materials.

Where 10m² or more of asbestos containing vinyl tiles are to be removed, and the asbestos remains in a bonded state, it must only be removed by an A or B class certificate holder (refer to the *Workplace Health and Safety Regulation 2008*). The removal of asbestos containing vinyl tiles must be performed in accordance with the *Code of Practice for the Safe Removal of Asbestos 2nd edition*.

Signage and labelling

Warning signs must be used to alert people to the presence of asbestos containing material at the workplace. At a minimum, one clearly visible sign warning of the presence of asbestos containing material must be installed at a main entrance. These signs should state that the register should be consulted before any work commences.

A competent person must determine the number and position of labels required. If it is not practicable to label the asbestos containing material and a risk assessment suggests asbestos containing material might be disturbed or people might be exposed, a prominent warning sign must be displayed in the immediate vicinity.

The asbestos containing material register

Asbestos backed vinyl sheet flooring and asbestos containing vinyl tiles, or any vinyl sheet flooring or tiles which are presumed to contain asbestos, must be entered into the asbestos containing material register.

For more information

Visit www.worksafe.qld.gov.au or call the Workplace Health and Safety Infoline on 1300 369 915.

Visit the WHSQ website to download:

- *Identifying and recording asbestos in the workplace* fact sheet
- *Air monitoring when removing asbestos* fact sheet
- *Clearance inspections for asbestos work areas* fact sheet
- *Code of Practice for the Management and Control of Asbestos in Workplaces*
- *Code of Practice for the Safe Removal of Asbestos 2nd edition*
- *Workplace Health and Safety Act 1995*
- *Workplace Health and Safety Regulation 2008*.

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