TOOLBOX TALK #7
Critical Risks – Working around asbestos
Updated October 2017

Asbestos – how much do you know?
Asbestos is a naturally occurring mineral that was a popular component of many building materials used in the construction or refurbishment of homes in New Zealand, particularly between 1940 and 1990.

Step 1: IDENTIFY where it could be
Asbestos may be found in some of the following places:
- Roofs
- Ceilings
- External cladding and eaves
- Interior walls and finishes
- Floors
- Insulation and pipes
- Flues and seals on wood burners
- Fuse boards
- Fences
- Excavations (pipes)

Step 2: ASSESS – test to confirm
If you are unsure whether asbestos may be present, stop work and consult a specialist, do not risk exposure. The only way to positively confirm the presence of asbestos in a building material is to have the material analysed. You should ensure the laboratory you’re using to test the sample is using a method they’re accredited for to conduct the test, otherwise there may be a misleading or incorrect result.

Visit www.ianz.govt.nz/directory and search ‘asbestos’ in the keyword section for a full list of accredited testing facilities.

Snap Quiz
You may want to ask these questions at the start, or as you go through each section.

- Name five places asbestos, or asbestos containing materials, could be found. See Step 1 for answers.
- What happens when asbestos is confirmed by testing? An asbestos removal or management plan must be put in place.
Step 3: MANAGE the risk
Bonded asbestos left undisturbed, in good condition or sealed is relatively safe, but if it is easily crumbled, broken down or damaged – or if you intend to disturb it – it can be harmful.

There are a number of ways to manage asbestos. These include:

- **Removal** – note under the Asbestos Regulations 2016 all asbestos likely to be disturbed by demolition or refurbishment must be identified and as far as reasonably practicable, removed prior to demolition.
- **Encapsulation** – coating ACM with a product that penetrates into and hardens the material.
- **Sealing** – applying a protective coating to the ACM that creates an impermeable seal for the asbestos, eg paint.
- **Enclosure** – placing a barrier between the ACM and the surrounding environment.

Before doing anything an asbestos management plan that clearly describes the process to be followed on site should be prepared. It will aim to ensure that no one involved in the work or in the vicinity of the work will be exposed to asbestos fibres. A clearance inspection of the asbestos removal area must be carried out once the work is complete.

Who can carry out asbestos work?
There are certain types of work with asbestos containing materials that by law can only be carried out by a licenced asbestos removalist’s holder nominated supervisors and removal workers. WorkSafe manages the licensing system under the Health and Safety at Work (Asbestos) Regulations 2016.

There is a transitional plan in place for operators holding a Certificate of Competence for Restricted Work with Asbestos under the old legislation. That means those certificate holders can operate as an asbestos licence holder until 4 April 2018 or when their certificate expires – whichever comes first.

For a list of licence holders and their nominated supervisors or removal workers, go to the critical risk Asbestos page mentioned below. This page also links through to updated guidance from WorkSafe.

Disposal
Asbestos waste must be disposed of at an approved local authority refuse site. It must not be sold or re-used. Before removal:
- An asbestos waste disposal plan should be prepared to outline your process.
- The asbestos waste must be securely stored on site.

Wear the right gear
If asbestos is or may be present personal and respiratory protective equipment must be worn, including:
- Respiratory protective equipment (RPE) to avoid inhaling asbestos fibres.
- Overalls (either disposable or able to be washed in specialised laundries) to avoid the risk of carrying asbestos fibres off site.
- Non-laced footwear which is easy to clean, or disposable boot covers.

Where do we get more information?
The Safety Charter’s Critical Risk Asbestos webpage has more information which is regularly updated. You can view it here or by clicking on Improve Health & Safety – Critical Risks – Asbestos from the homepage.

You may also want to look at Safety Charter toolbox talk #8 Critical Risks - Construction Dust including silica. If you want toolbox talks on the other 12 critical risks you can check them out online.

Employee issues raised:

Date to be resolved by:

Thank you to WorkSafe New Zealand for providing information for this toolbox talk.