

Hazardous Building Material

Purpose

This policy describes how Bridge Housing manages hazardous building materials in the properties that we own and those we manage on behalf of other owners.

Scope

The policy is applicable to all properties managed by Bridge Housing, the people who live in them and the people who visit them, including Bridge Housing staff and contractors. The policy ensures that Bridge Housing takes all reasonable and practical steps to eliminate or minimize the impact that hazardous materials can have on health and safety within our homes.

This policy complies with Work Health and Safety Legislation, the Safe Work Australia Codes of Practice and relevant Australian Standards.

Policy

Bridge Housing acknowledges its responsibility to provide homes which are safe from hazardous building materials and will do all that is reasonably practicable in order to meet this commitment.

Hazardous Building Materials

Buildings contain many different types of materials and associated chemicals. Unless managed and handled properly some of these can potentially affect the health of people undertaking works and those living there.

Materials such as lead paint or asbestos that are in good condition, not peeling or creating dust, or are sealed behind non-hazardous materials such as new paint, are relatively safe. If the material is in good condition, it is best to leave it alone. Disturbing or removing it unsafely can create a greater hazard.

The hazardous building materials most typically under consideration in Australia are:

- Asbestos
- Lead-based paint systems
- Polychlorinated biphenyls (PCB)

Lead Based Paint

Lead paint was widely used in the construction of houses and domestic building stock in NSW. Lead paint was used domestically up to 1970 with some types containing up to 50% lead.

Until advised otherwise, Bridge Housing treats all properties built before 1970 as if they contain paints with high levels of lead. Exposure to lead is a health hazard. Even small amounts of dust or chips of paint containing lead, generated during minor home repairs, can be a health risk. Anyone painting a house or doing maintenance that could disturb paint containing lead should avoid exposing themselves and their families, neighbours or pets to its hazards.

The recommended amount of lead in domestic paint has declined from 50% before 1965, to 1% in 1965. In 1992, it was reduced to 0.25%, and in 1997 it was further reduced to 0.1%.

Those Most Affected

Lead can affect anybody, but children under the age of four, pregnant women, young people under the age of 16 and those continually working with lead are most at risk.

The Bridge Housing properties that were constructed prior to 1997 may contain lead paint. Bridge Housing will do everything reasonably practicable to ensure the safety of residents, staff contractors and neighbours.

Identification and Remediation

As part of the three yearly property assessment cycle, Bridge Housing Technical Officers consider the condition of the paintwork for each property, particularly where lead paint may be present. Similar inspections are done on vacant properties and where lead paint is found to be present remediation is undertaken as part of the scope for the void. A property will not be re-let until the lead paint risk has been removed where reasonably practicable to do so.

All properties that we manage which are over 15 years old and have flaking paint are noted for an immediate inspection.

Intact lead paint is not considered a hazard, although the paint should be maintained and its original condition monitored to ensure that it doesn't deteriorate.

If lead paint is suspected, the tenant will be informed and a competent lead assessor will collect samples and have them tested by a laboratory. Lead paint assessment, preparation of surfaces, paint removal or repainting, clean-up and clearance testing upon completion of work will be undertaken using lead safe practices in accordance with Australian Standards (AS4361.2). Painting contractors who undertake work where there is potential lead paint hazards must be appropriately trained in accordance with lead safe practices.

Bridge Housing requires all of its contractors to provide a Material Data Sheet (MDS), completed Risk Assessments and Safe Work Method Statements for dealing with lead paint and the relevant disclaimers included in contractor quotation.

Where properties, managed by Bridge Housing on behalf of other owners are found to contain lead paint the owner or their representative will be informed immediately so that an agreed approach to remediation can be determined.

Lead Dust in Ceiling Cavities, Wall Cavities and Sub-Floor Areas

Many older Australian homes and buildings have lead dust in their ceiling cavities, in wall cavities and under the floor. This dust has built up over many years from many sources, including renovations to the home or nearby industrial pollution, exhaust from cars using leaded petrol, and fumes from burning wood or coal. The breakdown of old lead paint is also an important source of dust in pre-1970 houses.

The dust in roof voids does not pose a risk if ceilings, cornices and ceiling roses are in good repair. In fact, the dust is better left untouched if there is no leakage into living spaces. Some maintenance or renovation activities may disturb dust and increase the risk of contaminating living areas. These include:

- Demolishing ceilings or cavity walls
- Adding a second-story extension
- Putting in an attic ladder or skylight
- Installing insulation or new electrical wiring
- Working in the ceiling cavity for any reason.

Bridge Housing will assume dust in pre-1997 houses contains lead unless tests prove otherwise. So, if lead paint is suspected a competent lead assessor will collect samples and have them tested by a laboratory. If lead dust is confirmed it will be removed by a licensed contractor according to approved methods, Risk Assessments and Safe Work Method Statements.

Poly Chlorinated Biphenyl's (PCB's)

PCB is an abbreviation for polychlorinated biphenyls, a group of synthetic, chlorinated organic compounds. PCBs are oily, viscous liquids and chemically very stable. They are toxic chemicals responsible for environmental pollution and are suspected human carcinogens. Prolonged exposure may result in an unusual form of dermatitis called chloracne. Adverse health effects may occur in people who have excessive exposure to PCBs over prolonged periods. PCB materials may be encountered in electrical equipment imported or manufactured before 1975.

Bridge Housing will engage a qualified contractor to dispose of components of light fittings containing PCB's once detected in accordance with legislative requirements and industry best practice thereby preventing environmental contamination and acting in the best interests of health and safety.

Asbestos

A wide range of building and construction products containing asbestos were available up to 1987. Asbestos was banned from being used in fibro or sheet asbestos cement products made after 1982, corrugated products (mainly roofing materials) in 1984 and all other products by 1986. Its use was completely banned in 2003.

Removing or working with building materials that contain asbestos can release asbestos fibres, creating a health risk. These fibres are too small to see, but if they are breathed in, imbedded asbestos fibres irritate lung tissue around them, causing a number of diseases. Asbestos related diseases can take many years to develop. Most diseases will not become apparent for at least 10 years after exposure to asbestos and more commonly 15-20 years. Some diseases, such as mesothelioma may take up to 40 or more years to develop.

As a starting point, Bridge Housing assumes that all properties that it manages and owns which were built between 1940 and 1987 contain asbestos materials until this is shown not to be the case.

Identifying Asbestos in our Properties

It should be noted that asbestos in homes is not considered a risk to health and safety if it is undamaged. Bridge Housing takes all reasonable steps to ensure that we become aware of all instances where asbestos has been damaged and may cause a risk. These include:

- Inspecting the condition of asbestos as part of the three yearly property condition assessments undertaken on all of our properties;
- Requiring all of our contractors whether asbestos specialists or not to report instances where they consider there might be a risk of asbestos damage;
- Requiring all of our staff to report instances where they consider there might be a risk of asbestos damage;
- Encouraging tenants to report instances where asbestos damage has occurred; and,
- Encourage support partners and other advocates to inform Bridge Housing where they suspect damage has occurred.

When Damaged Asbestos is Found

If asbestos is identified as being disturbed or in poor condition Bridge will take the following action:

- Advise the tenant and neighbours and provide information on how they should prepare for the work to be undertaken and eliminate the risk of health impacts
- Engage a licensed asbestos consultant to advise on risk mitigation and control strategies
- Record the event in the Asbestos Register
- Where the property is not owned by Bridge Housing, advise the owner so that they can be engaged in determining the most appropriate solution, and
- Where appropriate appoint a licensed asbestos removalist.

Our licensed contractor must put in place an Asbestos Management Plan for each job, which considers:

- Ensuring a competent person maintains regular surveillance of the area
- Conducting air monitoring while working in the affected area
- Developing procedures for the safe disposal of asbestos waste
- Decontamination procedures for workers and wash down procedures for workers leaving an affected area.

Where latent asbestos needs to be removed in a social housing dwelling, Bridge Housing will comply with the procedure provided in the Land and Housing Corporation Asset Management Framework 2017.

Vacant Properties

Where a vacant property is found to contain damaged asbestos it will not be re-let until the asbestos risk has been removed.

Tenant Alterations to a Property

Where a tenant wishes to make alterations to their home, the Bridge Housing's Alterations and Modifications to a Property Policy applies. In order to determine whether Bridge Housing will allow the alterations to occur, it will assess:

- Whether the home has asbestos products
- The degree to which those products will be altered (for example drilled, cut, removed)
- Whether the tenant intends to use licensed asbestos contractors to manage the work, and
- The likely impact on neighbours.

Hazardous Material Management Plan and Hazardous Substances Register

When Bridge Housing is made aware that hazardous substances such as lead paint or synthetic mineral fibre are present or where it could potentially be a hazard, Bridge Housing will immediately act to remove the hazard or where this is not practical, minimise any impact.

As part of our annual Property Condition Assessment, where hazardous material is known to exist it will be recorded on the Bridge Housing Property Register. This will allow us to inform our contractors of any risks when carrying out works on properties and allow us to better manage the safety of the tenant and their families living in the home. This data will be incorporated into our Annual and Ten Year Asset Management Plans so that we are able to plan our approach to taking all reasonable steps to eliminate, or where this is not possible, minimise the impact on health and safety.

When we become aware of hazardous material in properties that we manage on behalf of other owners, we will immediately advise the owner. In accordance with the Contaminated Land Management Act 1997 Bridge Housing will report all significant contamination to the Environmental Protection Authority.

Compliments, Complaints and Appeals

If a tenant is not satisfied with a service provided by Bridge Housing or does not agree with a decision it has made, they can ask for a formal review. Bridge Housing's *Compliments, Complaints and Appeals Policy* outlines how we will undertake a review of our decision. A copy of our policy and information leaflet, is available from Bridge Housing's office or downloaded from our website www.bridgehousing.org.au.

Bridge Housing also welcomes compliments on our service delivery. To give Bridge Housing staff or a contractor a compliment you can call and speak with our reception team over the telephone or alternatively by emailing customerservice@bridgehousing.org.au.