OPERATIONAL PROTOCOLS
FOR
Management of Asbestos Incidents
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Management of Asbestos Incidents

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This protocol should be read in conjunction with other RFS Policies, Service Standards, Operational Procedures, Operational Protocols and any document relating to emergency operations such as:

- Service Standard 3.1.13 Operational Management, Response and Reporting.
- Service Standard 3.1.6 Fire and Other Incident Operations.
- Service Standard 3.2.1 Coordinated Firefighting, Incident Management, Air Operations and Assistance.
- Service Standard 1.1.4 Health, Safety & Welfare.

Purpose

As firefighter, health and safety is our overriding priority. These Operational Protocols establish practices to be followed to safely manage and mitigate the hazard or perceived hazard associated with the exposure to asbestos dust on the fire ground.

Asbestos is a naturally occurring silicate mineral with long, thin, fibrous crystals. The word *asbestos* is derived from a Greek adjective meaning inextinguishable.

Between 1945 and 1980 in Australia, asbestos was extensively used in the building industry due to its flame-retardant and insulating properties, tensile strength, flexibility and resistance to chemicals. Asbestos fibres were often mixed with cement or woven into fabric or mats and made into construction products such as cement sheeting, insulation, pipes, paint, floor coverings, ceiling tiles and roofing materials.

But there is a problem. Asbestos is highly toxic if the material is disturbed and the fibres released and inhaled. Inhaling the fibres can cause a fibrous stiffening and shrinking of the lung as well as lung cancer, known as mesothelioma. The realisation of this resulted in several countries banning the use of asbestos in many construction products in the mid 1980s.

Structures that contain asbestos materials create a potential health risk to firefighters particularly if the buildings become involved with fire or collapse, as the possibility of asbestos material breaking and asbestos fibres being released into the air is very high.

Due to this increased risk this protocol includes specific decontamination processes that must be implemented to ensure a firefighter's exposure to asbestos is minimised.
Operational Procedures

1. At all structural incidents the Incident Controller must assess the structure/s involved to determine if asbestos is present or suspected.

⚠️ IMPORTANT: If in doubt it is better for fire fighter safety that you activate these protocols.

If the existence of an asbestos hazard is suspected or confirmed the following applies:

2. All personnel attending the location must immediately:

   2.1 Be made aware of the hazard.

   2.2 Request the Asbestos Decontamination Kit.

   2.3 If not wearing CABA, members must don a P2 level or higher dust mask. (AS/NZS 1716:2003: Respiratory Protective Devices)

   2.4 Ensure that vehicle doors remain closed at all times and that all cabin windows are up.

3. The area must be treated as hazardous and all non essential personnel and vehicles should be kept away from the hot zone and out of the smoke plume.

⚠️ IMPORTANT: The identification of asbestos and the implementation of this Protocol is a notifiable incident and Incident Controllers must advise Fire Comms as soon as practicable. DTZs must notify State Operations in accordance with Operational Management Procedure 4.03.01.

4. A decontamination area must be established as indicated in these protocols.

5. All members who attend the incident location must be decontaminated prior to departing the scene as outlined in these protocols.

6. Personnel conducting the decontamination process must:

   6.1 Wear disposable overalls, disposable gloves and P2 mask for the duration of the procedure.

   6.2 Remain in the decontaminating area until finished and decontamination is carried out on them.

⚠️ WARNING! Under no circumstances may personnel who are wearing suspected or confirmed contaminated clothing enter vehicle cabins, return to the station or private residence prior to undergoing decontamination procedures.

7. Decontamination of personnel must remain the 1st priority for decontamination assistants. Equipment cleaning must be a 2nd priority and carried out when circumstances allow.

8. Once a member has been decontaminated they must keep well away from the hot zone and out of any smoke.
Post Procedures - On Site

IMPORTANT: The conduct of these procedures will result in a contaminated clothing bag(s) and a contaminated waste bag, both of which must be sealed utilising the tape supplied in the decontamination kit.

9. The sealed bag(s) containing contaminated clothing may be transported back to the station, however contamination bags must not be transported in a vehicle cabin.

10. The sealed bag containing waste materials is to be clearly marked as contaminated waste and left at the site of contamination for disposal by the owner/occupier.

11. Ensure asbestos contaminated area is marked with standard RFS red/white barrier tape provided.

12. The Incident Controller must:

   12.1 Advise owner/occupier of potential health hazard via the Notice of Hazard to Health form provided and hand over responsibility of the site to the owner/occupier upon departure.

   12.2 Complete the personnel attendance lists provided and return a copy to the relevant DTZ office as soon as practical.

Post Procedures - Off Site

13. DTZ offices must be advised that contaminated personal protective clothing is present at the station and make arrangements for the collection and laundering with designated service providers.

WARNING! The laundering of contaminated clothing in homes is strictly prohibited. Only approved laundering facilities are to launder contaminated clothing. A list of approved laundry establishments is available via the RFS Intranet under the Health, Safety and Welfare page.

14. Initiate ordering action as required to replace expended items in the decontamination kit. Utilise the kit component order form to expedite the process.

15. Ensure normal reporting actions are completed/ finalised.

It is probable that the materials used to construct this shed contain asbestos fibres
Identifying asbestos

Asbestos cement sheet, roofing sections & other manufactured products used in Australia were banned in 1982, 1984, 1986 and a total ban on all asbestos use was introduced in 2003.

Materials containing asbestos are mostly found in roofing, eaves and wet areas such as bathrooms and laundries, in the form of asbestos cement sheeting.

Only chemical testing can truly identify asbestos materials, but any fibrous cement product manufactured prior to 1987 may contain asbestos. The majority of homes built before 1982 would have materials containing asbestos. Homes built between 1982 and 1987 may have them.

As a general rule structures built prior to 1987 should be regarded as containing asbestos materials and therefore become the trigger for activation of this protocol.

Some points that may help fire fighters identify an asbestos hazard include:

- The age and type of structure
- Construction materials
- Existence of an asbestos register or pre incident plan
- Local knowledge and
- Information from the owner/occupier.
Minimising exposure risk during fire fighting

Incident Controllers should exercise fire fighting tactics with a consideration to keeping dust concentrations to a minimum and causing minimal disturbance to materials. The following techniques should be employed:

- Wherever feasible the application of a water fog to the disturbed materials will significantly minimise the amount of airborne respirable particulate.
- Keep affected area thoroughly wet with continued application of water.

⚠️ IMPORTANT: Avoid the use of high pressure sprays directly onto suspect materials.
- Fire fighters should avoid cutting, drilling or unnecessary movement of any material suspected of containing asbestos.

In the event that tactical hazmat information is required, the applicable RFS Duty Officer may contact the relevant NSWFB Hazmat On Call Officer via the relevant ComCen to obtain hazardous material safety advice prior to the arrival of a NSWFB appliance to ensure protection of the public and first responders in accordance with the Operational Communications Service Level Agreement (OCSLA).

Decontamination Process

For all incidents where the presence of asbestos dust is confirmed or suspected the following decontamination procedures are to be applied to Service personnel and equipment prior to departing the location.

Establish a wash down area and set up equipment in accordance with instructions contained within the Decontamination Kit and diagram as displayed on page 11.

Wash down area should be positioned external to the hot zone, on solid ground and upwind of the incident. Preference should be given to ground that slopes towards the area confirmed or suspected of being contaminated.

One (or more) member(s) should be designated to assist with the decontamination procedure.

Fire fighters undergoing decontamination must wear a P2 mask or CABA until the decontamination process is complete.

Personnel

**Step 1** Fire fighter undergoing decontamination has outer clothing thoroughly wetted down by the application of a fine water spray. Fire fighter removes helmet and goggles (if applicable).

**Step 2** Separate helmet neck cape. Neck cape is placed in contaminated clothing bag provided. Helmet and goggles are set aside for equipment cleaning procedure.

**Step 3** Fire fighter undergoing decontamination moves forward to disrobing area.
Operational circumstances should determine if boots are to be removed and set aside for equipment cleaning. If boots are to be re-worn care must be exercised to ensure re-contamination does not occur.

Protective clothing ensemble and gloves to be removed and placed in contaminated clothing bag.

**Step 4** Once soft garments are removed and placed in contaminated clothing bag and other apparatus is set aside for equipment cleaning, fire fighter/s undergoing decontamination shall dry themselves as necessary with disposable towelling provided in the decontamination kit.

All waste used in decontamination procedure including disposable P2 masks and towelling must be placed in a separate contaminated waste materials bag provided in the decontamination kit.

**Step 5** Fire fighter/s undergoing decontamination moves forward to the clean area and dons disposable overalls. Decontamination assistants do not move into the clean area or further assist decontaminated fire fighter/s.

Decontaminated fire fighter/s proceed away from the clean area.

**Equipment**

Equipment that will require decontamination includes goggles, torches and CABA sets, also any equipment that was utilised within the hot zone suspected or confirmed as being contaminated.

**Step 1** Equipment to be decontaminated should be located at the wet/disrobing section within the area used for personal decontamination.

**Step 2** Equipment to be thoroughly washed down with water. Post wash down, all surfaces to be wiped with towelling provided in the decontamination kit. Other suitable cloth or paper material may be utilised if necessary.

All materials utilised for the wipe down procedure are to be placed in contaminated waste materials bag provided in the decontamination kit.

**IMPORTANT:** Particular care must be taken in the cleaning process to ensure that all surfaces are wiped down. Material utilised for the wipe down procedure should be replaced at frequent intervals. Towelling or cloth should not be wrung out and re used.

**Step 3** Cleaned equipment should be re-stowed without delay. Take care to avoid mixing cleaned and uncleaned equipment.
Step 4  On completion of equipment decontamination, assistants should proceed to the designated clean area to remove disposable overalls, gloves and mask. Disposable materials must be placed in contaminated waste bag.

Step 5  **Hose Decontamination** Lay-flat hose contaminated with asbestos fibres must be treated as hazardous waste and must be placed in the contaminated waste bag for disposal.

Lay flat hose utilised at the incident but not suspected of being contaminated (i.e. relay or supply) should be cleaned in accordance with the equipment decontamination procedure.

Step 6  **Vehicle Decontamination**, Vehicles parked within the hot zone are to be thoroughly hosed down prior to leaving the site.
GENERAL LAYOUT OF ASBESTOS DECONTAMINATION AREA
TYPICAL “ZONING” OF AN ASBESTOS INCIDENT INCLUDING DECONTAMINATION ZONE
(NOT TO SCALE)
MANAGEMENT OF ASBESTOS

PROCEDURAL REFERENCE GUIDE

The purpose of this procedural reference guide is to provide a check list of tasks to be undertaken to help the user execute the requirements of this protocol document. It is in no way a complete list of the procedures for this subject.

Procedure check list

- ALL PERSONNEL ADVISED ASBESTOS MANAGEMENT PROTOCOLS ARE IMPLEMENTED
- REQUEST THE DELIVERY OF THE ASBESTOS DECONTAMINATION KIT
- ALL PERSONNEL DONNED P2 MASK OR COMPRESSED AIR BREATHING APPARATUS
- VEHICLES ARE STATIONED APPROPRIATELY, VEHICLE DOORS CLOSED / ALL WINDOWS AND VENTS CHECKED CLOSED / A/C OFF
- APPLICATION OF WATER FOG TO SUSPECT MATERIALS (IF APPLICABLE)

*************************************

- NOMINATE PERSONNEL TO ESTABLISH DECONTAMINATION WASH DOWN AREA
- AREA IDENTIFIED FOR DECONTAMINATION WASH DOWN PROCEDURES
- DECONTAMINATION WASH DOWN AREA ESTABLISHED IN ACCORDANCE WITH PROTOCOLS
- DECONTAMINATION WASH DOWN ASSISTANTS DON DISPOSABLE OVERALLS, P2 MASK, DISPOSABLE GLOVES
- BRIEFING FOR DECONTAMINATION WASHDOWN ASSISTANTS

*************************************

- PERSONNEL DECONTAMINATION COMMENCED AT (TIME)
- NUMBER OF PERSONNEL TO BE DECONTAMINATED

*************************************

- PERSONNEL DECONTAMINATION FINALISED AT (TIME)
- EQUIPMENT DECONTAMINATION FINALISED AT (TIME)

*************************************

- CONTAMINATED WASTE BAGS SECURED ON SITE
- CONTAMINATED CLOTHING BAGS SECURED ON VEHICLE (EXTERNAL TO CABIN)
- CONTAMINATED AREA MARKED WITH RED AND WHITE TAPE
- NOTICE OF HAZARD TO HEALTH FORM COMPLETED & ISSUED/ PERSONNEL ATTENDACE FORM FILLED OUT
- REPORTING ACTIONED IN ACCORDANCE WITH OPERATIONAL MANAGEMENT PROCEDURES

*************************************

- FIRE CONTROL CENTRE ADVISED FOR ACTIONING CLEANING OF CONTAMINATED CLOTHING
- ORDERING ACTIONED FOR THE RE-SUPPLY OF DISPOSABLE ITEMS UTILISED WITHIN THE ASBESTOS DECONTAMINATION KIT
## Glossary

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<td>Asbestos</td>
<td>A fibrous silicate mineral that is incombustible and is used as cladding or a heat resistant or insulating material.</td>
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<td>Asbestos Register</td>
<td>The asbestos management code and the <em>Workplace Health and Safety Regulation</em> require that owners of workplaces keep an accurate register of asbestos-containing materials (ACM) on the premises. All workplaces built before 1 January 1990 should already have an asbestos register and safety policies and procedures for friable asbestos.</td>
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<tr>
<td>CABA</td>
<td>Compressed Air Breathing Apparatus.</td>
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<td>Contaminated</td>
<td>Something harmful or unusable by the addition of a hazardous material.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Clothing</td>
<td>Fire fighting Personal Protective Equipment or civilian garments.</td>
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<td>Hazardous Materials Incident</td>
<td>Any incident or potential incident involving Class 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9 Dangerous Goods, or other substance which is actually endangering life or may endanger life or property or the environment, or where the use of specialised hazmat equipment, associated skills and training is required.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hot Zone</td>
<td>The area immediately surrounding the source of the release of the hazardous material. The concentration of the hazard in this zone may pose a critical threat to persons, property and the environment.</td>
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<tr>
<td>NSWFB ComCen</td>
<td>NSWFB’s Communication Centres established at Sydney, Newcastle, Wollongong and Katoomba responsible for receiving Triple Zero calls and Automatic Fire Alarms (AFAs).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Operational Communications Service Level Agreement (OCSLA)</td>
<td>A formal service level agreement between NSWFB and NSW RFS for the communication of emergency calls and related information, but does not deal with response to coordinated fires under Section 44 and 53 of the Rural Fire Act, 1997.</td>
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<td>Owner/ occupier</td>
<td>A person who is taken to be the possessor of a premises or a person having the charge, management or control of premises.</td>
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<tr>
<td>RFS Duty Officer</td>
<td>A delegated member responsible for response coordination of an incident in a rural fire district after normal business hours.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vehicle</td>
<td>An operational fire fighting appliance with visible and audible warning devices, or any civilian mode of transport.</td>
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APPENDIX 1 – Copy of Notice of Hazard to Health.
(Note: this form is located within the Notice of Hazard to Health Record carbon copy book)

NOTICE OF HAZARD TO HEALTH

For the purpose of safeguarding the health and safety of homeowners, their families and the general community the NSW Government has enacted regulations to facilitate the safe handling, removal and disposal of asbestos materials.

The structure located at:
....................................................................................................................
....................................................................................................................

Being a:
☐ Residential dwelling  ☐ Shop / factory or other commercial property
☐ Freestanding shed or garage  ☐ other ..............................................................

has sustained damage resultant from an event which required an emergency response from the NSW Rural Fire Service on the ....../....../......

THE STRUCTURE TO WHICH THIS NOTICE APPLIES IS SUSPECTED OR CONFIRMED AS CONTAINING ASBESTOS MATERIALS WHICH MAY HAVE BEEN EXPOSED OR DISTURBED AS A RESULT OF AN EMERGENCY EVENT AND MAY POSE A SERIOUS HEALTH RISK TO PERSONS IN THE VICINITY OF THE STRUCTURE.

► Prior to repair, salvage or demolition of the structure expert advice should be sought on the status of asbestos materials.

► Appropriate personal protective clothing including respiratory protection should be worn by persons at the location.

► During the conduct of the emergency response, materials used by the NSW Rural Fire Service may have been contaminated. For the safety of Rural Fire Service members and to prevent the spread of contamination such materials will be sealed in bags clearly identified as asbestos contaminated waste and will remain at the location for appropriate disposal action by the owner / occupier in accordance with regulatory requirements.

► The reverse of this Notice contains contact details of NSW Government Agencies which can provide information on the safe management and disposal of asbestos materials.

In accordance with NSW Rural Fire Service Standard Operating Procedure this Notice is provided to
(full name) ........................................................................................................... on the ....../....../......

being the: ☐ Owner / Occupier  ☐ Manager  ☐ Other ........................................ of the property concerned

by Rural Fire Service member (full name): .................................................................

................................................................. OF (brigade or FCO address): .................................................................

................................................................. CONTAMINATED WASTE DOES / DOES NOT REMAIN ON SITE FOR APPROPRIATE DISPOSAL ACTION BY OWNER / OCCUPIER.

N° of waste bags: ......... Located: ........................................................................

Signed: ............................................ Located: ....................................................

Date: ........................................ Ph: .................................................................
APPENDIX 2 – Copy of Personnel Attendance list
(Note: this form is located within the Notice of Hazard to Health Record carbon copy book)

FIRE GROUND ASBESTOS INCIDENT CHECKLIST

NOTE: This aide-mémoire is designed to assist the incident controller in the management of a fireground occurrence where the requirement for an asbestos decontamination protocol has been identified.

In managing an event where an asbestos exposure hazard has been identified the overriding principle is to ensure that all persons at the location breathe filtered air via a P2 rated mask and that clothing confirmed or suspected of contamination is removed in the prescribed manner and sealed in bags provided for decontamination by a professional cleaning agency.

All other items suspected of contamination must be thoroughly cleaned at the location, in the prescribed manner prior to being re-stowed. To assist with the facilitation of this Protocol the Incident Controller should record details within provided fields.

RECORD DETAILS OF INCIDENT
ADDRESS

ASBESTOS MANAGEMENT PROTOCOLS INITIATED AT (TIME) ON BY
INCIDENT CONTROLLER
THE PRESENCE OF ASBESTOS MATERIAL AT THE LOCATION IS SUSPECTED □ / CONFIRMED □ BY
ADVICE OF OWNER OR OCCUPIER □ / AGE OF STRUCTURE / MATERIALS □ / SIGNPOSTED □
OTHER □

RECORD DETAILS OF ALL SERVICE PERSONNEL ATTENDING INCIDENT.
NAME .............................................. BRIGADE ..............................................
NAME .............................................. BRIGADE ..............................................
NAME .............................................. BRIGADE ..............................................
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APPENDIX 3 – Contacts

CONTACTS

WorkCover NSW - Asbestos/Demolition Hotline  (02) 8260 5885
www.workcover.nsw.gov.au

Legislative Requirements
WorkCover Information Centre              13 10 50
www.workcover.nsw.gov.au

Approved Asbestos Disposal Information
Department of Environment and Climate Change (02) 9995 5000
Environment line                               13 15 55
NSW Environment Solutions                      1300 6551 116
www.environment.nsw.gov.au

Your Local Council
www.dlg.nsw.gov.au