

# Asbestos Management in Public Sector Agencies

Report 3 – April 2015

## Objective

This audit assessed if seven public sector agencies managed asbestos risks effectively. These agencies were responsible for over 50 000 properties. We also assessed how Building Management and Works (BMW) managed asbestos risks in its delivery of building and maintenance services to other agencies.

## Background

Asbestos is a naturally occurring substance widely used in the construction industry between 1945 and 1980. Due to the health risks associated with exposure to asbestos, its import and new use was banned by December 2003.

Asbestos fibres may be so tiny they can be inhaled deeply into the lungs causing a range of diseases.

The risk asbestos poses is very low when it is in good condition and left undisturbed. If it is poorly managed, fibres can be released, increasing the health risks. As multiple exposures increase the risk, it is important to minimise exposure.

Government agencies are required to identify asbestos present in properties they own or lease. They also need to assess the level of risk, create a register and manage the risks using an Asbestos Management Plan (AMP).

## Conclusion and Key Findings

All agencies were aware of the need to manage asbestos risks and had registers and AMPs. However, just three of the seven agencies managed their known asbestos risks well and demonstrated better practice. These agencies had regular inspections, remediated high-risk asbestos as a priority, kept up-to-date records, provided staff with training and communicated the risks to staff and others.

The other four agencies had room for improvement. These agencies remediated or removed high-risk asbestos as a priority, but their registers and AMPs



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were incomplete or not up to date. In addition, weaknesses in their training or communication meant staff and others were not adequately informed of the presence of asbestos. These issues could mean that staff, workers or other occupiers of the building inadvertently disturb asbestos. Agencies could also incur additional or duplicated costs if their register is not updated following remediation.

BMW effectively managed asbestos in capital works projects and the government properties it looked after. However, it needed to improve the asbestos inspection and register services it provides to other agencies.

The cost of managing asbestos is difficult to determine as only three agencies kept separate records. Their records show a combined cost in 2013-14 of \$7.8 million.

Since 2010, there has been no single agency responsible for coordinating asbestos management. This led to inconsistent re-inspection timeframes and risk ratings for asbestos and duplication of inspections.

## Recommendations

Agencies should:

- regularly inspect their properties to identify asbestos and assess risks
- ensure a complete and up-to-date register is on-site at all properties containing asbestos
- have complete and current Asbestos Management Plans
- provide refresher training to their asbestos inspectors, and awareness training to other staff
- collect information on cost to manage asbestos. They should also plan and budget for future costs if significant.

Government should consider developing a plan for asbestos management by public sector agencies.



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