

Switchboard panel repair work and asbestos safety

Working with switchboard panels

The AS/NZS 3000:2018 *Electrical installations*, also known as the wiring rules, defines a repair as 'the work to restore the electrical installation to a safe and sound working condition after deterioration or damage has occurred'. This type of work is often seen with upgrading kilowatt-hour meters or replacing older semi-enclosed fuses in older homes.

The wiring rules prohibit electrical workers from using semi-enclosed rewirable fuses to replace semi-enclosed rewirable fuses. Electrical workers must replace the fuse with a circuit breaker in such instances.

There are **no requirements** to upgrade switchboard fuses to circuit breakers if the repair work involves electrical components that **are not related** to fuse repair work (i.e. replacement of a main switch).

Managing the health risks of asbestos exposure

Repair work is often carried out on older homes which have switchboards panels made from asbestos containing materials, also known as ACM. This can lead to the risk of a person being exposed to asbestos.

Asbestos is a hazardous material that can pose a risk to a person's health. Inhalation of airborne asbestos fibres can cause mesothelioma (organ cancer), asbestosis (lung disease) and lung cancer.

To reduce the risks when removing switchboard panels with asbestos containing materials, you should follow the removal procedures in the *Code of practice: How to safely remove asbestos*. If drilling is required, the control process should be consistent with the measures described in Appendix 7 of the *Code of practice: How to manage and control asbestos in the workplace*.

Asbestos removal requirements

The two main types of asbestos are:

- **friable asbestos**, being any asbestos containing material in powder form or that can be easily crumbled, pulverised or reduced to a powder by hand pressure when dry; and
- **non-friable asbestos**, being any asbestos-containing material other than friable asbestos, such as with switchboard panels.

Western Australia's work health and safety laws require asbestos to be removed by a licensed asbestos removalist. There are two classes of licensed asbestos removalists.

- Class A - can remove all types and amounts of asbestos (friable and non-friable).
- Class B - can only remove non-friable asbestos materials.

Under work health and safety laws, no more than 10 square metres of non-friable asbestos can be removed without a licence. This means an electrician can remove less than 10 square metres of non-friable asbestos (such as a switchboard panel) and replace it with non-asbestos alternatives during maintenance work. You must be trained and competent in the removal of asbestos and use safe work methods to ensure the work does not create a risk to you or others.

With regards to asbestos in a workplace, the Work Health and Safety (General) Regulations 2022 require the following.

- People to not be exposed to asbestos dust.
- Asbestos to be identified, labelled and the risks assessed by a competent person.
- A register and management plan detailing the type, location and condition of the asbestos to be available and reviewed regularly.
- The holding of an appropriate licence for removal of any quantity of friable asbestos containing materials or for more than 10 square metres of non-friable asbestos containing materials.
- WorkSafe to be notified of all licensed asbestos removal work at least 5 days before commencement.

- Waste asbestos and contaminated personal protective equipment to be double wrapped, correctly labelled, securely transported and disposed of at a licensed disposal facility.
- Asbestos work areas to be left free of visible asbestos residue.
- Records to be kept, and WorkSafe notified, if a person has been exposed to asbestos.
- The provision of health monitoring by a registered medical practitioner where there is a risk to health from asbestos exposure.

More information

To assist you in dealing with asbestos, asbestos containing materials or asbestos- contaminated dust, you can access publications, such as *Asbestos: Information on asbestos in the workplace*, *Asbestos: frequently asked questions* and the *Asbestos safety for trades and construction workers* pamphlet on the Department of Energy, Mines, Industry Regulation and Safety's [website](#).

You can also confirm the validity of a licensed asbestos removalist or licensed asbestos assessor before using their services, via the WorkSafe [licence and registration search](#) page or the ServiceWA app.

Licensed asbestos removalists and those removing less than 10 square metres of non-friable asbestos can use the [Health and safety checklist: Class B Asbestos \(non-friable\) removal work](#) to assist with meeting work health and safety law requirements.

A gallery with photos of asbestos containing materials in homes is available at asbestosawareness.com.au

Disclaimer – The information contained in this fact sheet is provided as general information and a guide only. It should not be relied upon as legal advice or as an accurate statement of the relevant legislation provisions. If you are uncertain as to your legal obligations, you should obtain independent legal advice.

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