

Environmental and Occupational Health & Safety Unit

OHS ALERT

ASBESTOS IN IMPORTED BUILDING PRODUCTS

BACKGROUND

WorkCover NSW has reported that a prohibition notice has been issued to a building site in Sydney, following the discovery of asbestos in fibrous building panels imported to construct a residential building.

The panels were imported from China and were thought to be “asbestos free”, but subsequent testing by the National Association of Testing Authorities (NATA) showed they contained chrysotile (white) asbestos.

The expanded polystyrene (EPS) panels had been cut, and therefore significantly damaged on-site, with the builder ordered to engage a licensed asbestos removalist to remediate the site and remove the remaining panels.

WorkSafe is not aware

of this building material being imported for use in Victoria but is alerting both importers and suppliers of the need to take precautions to ensure that building products they import and supply do not contain asbestos. If there is

asbestos.

Similarly to NSW, the use of asbestos-containing material for construction (including residential buildings) is prohibited and is a criminal offence in Victoria.



Imported wall panels containing asbestos

uncertainty as to whether a material contains asbestos, testing by a NATA accredited laboratory must be undertaken and WorkSafe notified if material is found to contain asbestos. If the material is not tested, it must be assumed to contain

THE PROBLEM

Although it is illegal to manufacture asbestos-containing material in Victoria, asbestos is still used in manufactured products in some countries. Manufacturers in these countries may classify their

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goods as “asbestos free” even though they contain a low level of asbestos content. Nevertheless, it is illegal to, for example, supply, store, transport, sell and use goods containing asbestos in Victoria.

CONTROL MEASURES

Victorian importers of goods from countries which still manufacture asbestos-containing goods should be aware of the varying definitions and standards applied to manufactured products in the country of origin and/or supply.

“arrange for an independent test of the product/material by an accredited laboratory equivalent to NATA prior to shipping”

To ensure you do not import asbestos-containing goods into Victoria, you should:

1. obtain certification from the overseas manufacturer or supplier that the goods are “asbestos free” (and do not contain low amounts of asbestos content)

2. obtain product testing results from the overseas manufacturer or supplier that the product/material does not contain asbestos (the testing should be undertaken by an accredited laboratory equivalent to NATA)

3. arrange for an independent test of the product/material by an

accredited laboratory equivalent to NATA prior to shipping (in accordance with Australian Standard 4964 “Method for the

qualitative identification of asbestos in bulk samples”).

NATA accredited laboratories in Australia and international equivalent laboratories are listed at the NATA website at nata.com.au

FURTHER INFORMATION

The Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency has information for businesses importing materials about what to do to ensure imported products do not contain asbestos. Go to asbestosafety.gov.au/managing-importation-asbestos-australia

The Department of Immigration and Border Protection has important information on prohibited imports, including all forms of asbestos. Go to border.gov.au/Busi/Impo/Proh

If you suspect any imported product on your site may contain asbestos and if it can't be independently proven, in Australia, that it doesn't: don't handle it and contact the CFMEU.

CONTACT CFMEU: 9341 3444

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