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Tools down: New cancer data offers safety reminder for DIY renovators

New data from the [Australian Institute of Health and Welfare \(AIHW\)](#) highlights the ongoing risks of asbestos, with 684 Australians diagnosed with mesothelioma in 2024.

Mesothelioma is a cancer of the mesothelium, a protective membrane lining internal organs and body cavities. The most common type affects the lungs (pleural mesothelioma) and is linked almost exclusively to past exposure to asbestos.

The number of cases of mesothelioma diagnosed each year in Australia for both men and women has steadily increased over the past 40 years, as mesothelioma generally develops decades after exposure to harmful airborne asbestos fibres. However relative survival rates for the disease have improved.

This new data shows one in ten (11%) of cases of mesothelioma were diagnosed among people who have not been exposed at work. More than a third (37%) of people diagnosed were only exposed at work, whilst more than half (52%) were exposed at home and work.

More than half (51%) of people with non-occupational asbestos exposure had possible or probable exposure to asbestos when undertaking major home renovations.

Melissa Treby, Deputy Chair of Cancer Council's Occupational and Environmental Cancer Committee said the new data shows that Australians must not be complacent when it comes to safely managing asbestos.

"Since the national ban on asbestos came into effect in 2003, we've seen more Australians understand the dangers of asbestos and better workplace safety controls. However, people still may not know where asbestos can be found, particularly around the home, and how they can protect themselves," Treby said.

"Renovations can come with asbestos risk, as one in three houses in Australia still contain asbestos. Day to day, this can be low risk. However, asbestos containing materials are dangerous when they are damaged, disturbed or deteriorating as they then release asbestos fibres that are inhaled," Treby explains.

Asbestos containing materials can include flat and corrugated sheeting, cement pipes, insulation, floor tiles, adhesives, roofing, textiles or textured paints in properties built before 1990.

"The risk of developing mesothelioma increases with the duration of exposure to airborne asbestos fibres. As people begin renovations, it's important they are aware of dangers associated with asbestos and seek professional support."

"You cannot tell if something contains asbestos just by looking at it. If you're in a property built before 1990, it's best to assume it does contain asbestos and to contact an asbestos professional. The [Asbestos and Silica Safety and Eradication Agency](#) is a good place to start to find professionals to help."

“We want all Australians to enjoy their freshly renovated homes for many years to come. This means knowing when to DIY and when to put the tools down and call in professional support. We encourage all home renovators to seek professional support to identify and remove asbestos safely,” Treby concludes.

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Contact details

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About Cancer Council Australia

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- Undertake and fund cancer research
- Prevent and control cancer
- Provide information and support for people affected by cancer
- Shape and influence policy and practice

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