



Asbestos in Carpet Underlay

The Department of Health continues its investigation into the possibility of asbestos in some types of old carpet underlay

The Environmental Health Directorate (EHD) has been investigating media reports about hessian bags (previously used to transport asbestos) being recycled to make carpet underfelt and the possibility of this material being present in some West Australian homes.

The information has been based on statements of employees who worked in the bag recycling industry which is believed to have discontinued in the mid to late 1970's.

Reports indicate that hessian bags were used to transport asbestos from Wittenoom to Perth between 1950 and the early 1970's and a number were recycled in the manufacture of carpet underfelt

Advice of former employees was that most 'used' bags were repaired and sold to various industries for re use. Only those bags that were not repairable were recycled. It is believed that most of the hessian bags that were recycled had been used to transport wheat, wool or produce and a lesser number had been used to transport asbestos.

As the bag recycling process involved mechanical shredding, vibration and cleaning of material it is considered likely the majority of asbestos fibres would have been removed during the process.

The EHD has collected some samples of carpet underfelt believed to have been installed between the late 1960's to early 1970's. These have been tested by a National Association of Testing Authorities (NATA) Laboratory. The Asbestos Diseases Society has also had samples tested. No evidence of asbestos fibres has been found in any of the samples.

The EHD has encountered difficulties in obtaining samples of carpet underfelt in excess of 35 years old. It is working with the carpet industry to obtain further samples for analysis. Based on current information and results, the EHD is advising people that the risk of exposure to asbestos fibre from carpet underfelt was very low.

Mr Jim Dodds Director Environmental Health stated that 'if asbestos fibres were present they would be contained within the underfelt, under carpet and unlikely to become airborne unless the carpet was taken up and the underfelt disturbed'.



As a standard precaution, householders are advised to wear a Class P1 or P2 disposable facemask if they are intending to remove old carpet and underfelt. This would provide protection against inhaling dust and other allergens as well as any asbestos fibres that may be present.

This website will be updated as further sample results are obtained.

Please contact the Department of Health's Environmental Health Directorate on 9388 4999 if you have any further enquiries.