

Risks from supply of garden mulch contaminated with asbestos debris

The recent discovery of asbestos containing material (ACM) in garden mulch in New South Wales and Queensland highlights the importance of ensuring appropriate actions are taken when initiating landscaping activities.

Asbestos fibre hazard

The handling of garden mulch contaminated with ACM has the potential to further break up the ACM and cause asbestos fibres to become airborne. Health risks from asbestos arise from breathing in airborne asbestos fibres. Therefore, it is important to take reasonably practicable steps to ensure garden mulch supplied to department-owned facilities is free of asbestos contamination.

Who has responsibility for managing the risks?

Preventing contaminated mulch from making it to departmental facilities is critical. Therefore, primary responsibility for managing this risk is held by departmental staff involved in:

- engaging contractors to supply garden mulch as part of the contractors' works;
- arranging for garden mulch deliveries directly from suppliers.

What are facilities to do?

Make sufficient enquiries to understand the source of the mulch:

- all garden mulch must be sourced from reputable suppliers of landscape materials;
- risk of garden mulch contamination is substantially reduced when the suppliers have sourced their mulch directly from timber mills (due to the limited opportunities for cross-contamination of materials).

Obtain assurances from the mulch supplier that mulch is only transported in vehicles that have been inspected and cleaned of any other materials prior to loading for delivery.

Obtain sufficient documentation associated with the supply of mulch to facilitate the identification of the upstream supplier of the mulch should such enquiries be necessary. It is not sufficient to only know the business details of a transport service.

Do not use recycled garden mulch (mulch advertised as having been created from building materials such as pallets and fencing) unless assurances can be obtained from the supplier that the:

- manufacture of the mulch is controlled to prevent treated timber products and non-timber products being mixed into the mulch; and
- mulch is transported in vehicles that have been inspected and cleaned of any foreign materials before loading.

Where available, the above assurances should be obtained in writing through certificates or declarations.

The [Asbestos incident management procedure](#) must be followed if suspected ACM is discovered in garden mulch at facilities, with the key steps being STOP, RESTRICT AND REPORT.

Further information

The ACM mulch contamination events occurring in New South Wales and Queensland will continue to be monitored by the Department and suitable actions taken from any learnings that become available.