Safe Working Procedures (SWP) – Patching, sealing, painting, coating and cleaning of asbestos cement products

As a first priority, planning for the maintenance of ACM must include consideration of the removal of the ACM as the most preferred control option. Where removed, asbestos products must be replaced with a non-asbestos product.

These tasks should only be carried out on AC products that are in good condition, for this reason the AC material should be thoroughly inspected before commencing the work. There is a risk to health if the surface of asbestos cement sheeting is disturbed (e.g. from hail stones, storms and cyclones) or if the sheeting has deteriorated as a result of aggressive environmental factors such as pollution. In addition if asbestos cement sheeting is so weathered that its surface is cracked or broken, the asbestos cement matrix may again be eroded, increasing the likelihood that asbestos fibres will be released. If treatment of asbestos cement sheeting is considered essential, a method that does not disturb the matrix of the asbestos cement sheeting should be used. Under no circumstances should asbestos cement products be water blasted or dry sanded in preparation for painting, coating or sealing.

A risk assessment should be undertaken before any patching of ACM sheeting is commenced and only competent persons should carry out work with ACM. You can't tell whether a material contains asbestos simply by looking at it, unless it is labeled. If in doubt, treat the material as if it contains asbestos. When patching asbestos cement sheeting do not use a power drill as it may release asbestos fibres into the atmosphere.

Removal of asbestos products must be done in accordance with the NOHSC Code of Practice for the Safe Removal of Asbestos [NOHSC:2002(2005)].

Equipment
In addition to any equipment required to complete the particular task, the following equipment may be required on-site prior to commencing the work:

- Disposable cleaning rags;
- A bucket of water, or more, as appropriate and/or a misting spray bottle;
- Detergent;
- Sealant;
- Duct tape;
- Spare personal protective equipment (PPE);
- A suitable asbestos waste container (eg 200 μm plastic bags or a drum, bin or skip lined with 200 μm plastic sheeting) and 200 μm plastic sheeting;
- Warning signs and/or barrier tape; and
- An asbestos vacuum cleaner with high efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filters.

Personal Protective Equipment

- Protective clothing;
- Respirator: It is likely that a class P2 half face respirator will be adequate for this task, provided the recommended safe work procedure is followed and the mask is kept fitted during the activity;
- Disposable gloves or wash hands after patching.

Asbestos Work Area Preparation

- If the work is to be carried out at a height, appropriate precautions must be taken to prevent the risk of falls;
- Before starting, assess the asbestos cement for damage;
- Ensure appropriately marked asbestos waste disposal bags are available;
- Carry out the work with as few people present as possible;
- Segregate the asbestos work area to ensure unauthorized personnel are restricted from entry (eg close door and/or use warning signs and/or barrier tape at all entry points). The distance for segregation should be determined by a risk assessment;
- If working at a height, segregate the area below;
- If access is available to the rear of the asbestos cement, segregate this area as well, as above;
• If possible, use plastic sheeting, secured with duct tape, to cover any surface within the asbestos work area that could become contaminated;
• Ensure there is adequate lighting;
• Avoid working in windy environments where asbestos fibres can be redistributed;
• NEVER use high pressure water cleaning methods;
• NEVER prepare asbestos surfaces using dry sanding methods. Where sanding is required, consideration should be given to removing the ACM and replacing it with a non-asbestos product;
• Wet sanding methods may be used to prepare the AC material, provided precautions are taken to ensure all the runoff is captured, and filtered where possible;
• Wipe dusty surfaces with a damp cloth. If using a bucket of water, do not resoak used rags in the bucket, as this will contaminate the water. Instead, fold the rag so a clean surface is exposed or use another rag.

Patching, painting and sealing
• Make sure no one else is in the room when the patching work is being undertaken;
• Shut down any heating or cooling systems to minimize the spread of any released fibers;
• Determine the actions necessary to repair the damage while creating minimal disturbance of the ACM:
  ✓ can a temporary external patch of wall sheeting be glued over the damaged section;
  ✓ does the damaged section need to be filled with an approved wallboard filler;
  ✓ or does a backing piece need to be installed behind the damage and then filled;
• Place a plastic sheet on the floor below the area to be sampled and secure the edges with tape;
• If possible wet the material using a fine mist of water containing a few drops of detergent before commencing work, the water/detergent mist will reduce the release of asbestos fibers;
• Fill the damaged area with approved filler and sand the patch back to the appropriate level taking care not to pierce the underlying asbestos sheet;
• Use a damp cloth or paper towel to clean up the patch;
• Seal the filler with a primer/undercoat type paint.

Decontaminating the Asbestos Work Area and Equipment
• Use damp rags to clean the equipment. If using a bucket of water, do not resoak used rags in the bucket, as this will contaminate the water. Instead, fold the rag so a clean surface is exposed or use another rag;
• Carefully roll or fold any plastic sheeting used to cover any surface within the asbestos work area, so as not to spill any dust or debris that has been collected;
• If necessary, use damp rags and/or an asbestos vacuum cleaner to clean any remaining visibly contaminated sections of the asbestos work area;
• Place debris, used rags, plastic sheeting and other waste in the asbestos waste bags/container;
• Wet wipe the external surfaces of the asbestos waste bags/container to remove any adhering dust before they are removed from the asbestos work area.

Clearance Procedure
• Visually inspect the asbestos work area to make sure it has been properly cleaned;
• Clearance air sampling is not normally required for this task.

Personal Decontamination
• Remove all visible asbestos dust/residue from protective clothing using an asbestos vacuum cleaner and/or wet wiping;
• Remove disposable coveralls (while still using a respirator), and place in an asbestos waste bag and dispose of as asbestos waste;
• Clothing and footwear worn during the asbestos work should be vacuumed using an asbestos vacuum cleaner, and the footwear should also be wet wiped;
• Disposable respirators should then be discarded as asbestos waste. Not-disposable respirators should be removed and thoroughly cleaned;
• After removing the respirator, workers should wash their head, face and hands, paying particular attention to their fingernails.