



# Asbestos in Carpet Underlay

## Frequently Asked Questions

**Q: Is my carpet underfelt likely to contain dangerous asbestos fibres?**

**A:** No this is very unlikely. Carpet underlay made and installed since the mid 1970s was generally made from synthetic or natural materials that would not contain or have been contaminated with asbestos.

There is a slight possibility that some older hair felt-style underlay manufactured and installed prior to the early 1970s may have incorporated material sourced from hessian bags that were used to transport raw asbestos from mine sites to processing plants.

**Q: Does all underlay installed prior to the early 1970s contain asbestos?**

**A:** No. In 2006, the Environmental Health Directorate (EHD) of the Department of Health and Asbestos Diseases Society tested samples of hair felt underlay (believed to have been installed prior to 1970) from 11 Perth homes. None of the samples contained asbestos fibres. However, the number of samples from this era available for testing was low, so EHD has been cautious about suggesting that there is absolutely no risk. The average expected life of a good quality carpet is around 20 years, so it is unlikely that many homes still have carpet and underlay dating back to before the early 1970s.

Over the past 2-3 months, the EHD has collected samples of carpet underlay from an additional 12 Perth homes in order to further define the extent of any potential health risk. Of the 12 homes tested, one has proved positive for asbestos.

It has been ascertained that the carpet and underlay in the affected home was installed in the early 1950's. Further testing of underlay, carpet and dust from rooms in the home in which the affected underlay was situated indicates that the asbestos fibres remained within the underlay. It therefore appears that the risk of fibres becoming airborne and presenting a health risk is very low provided the carpet and underlay remain undisturbed.

**Q: Am I at risk and do I need to do anything if I have an old carpet/underfelt in my home?**

**A:** Our results (from samples tested from 23 homes) indicate that it is unlikely that asbestos fibres will be present in carpet underlay in Perth homes. Our results have only found traces of asbestos fibres in one home and the asbestos was contained within the underlay. However precautions (as outlined over page), should be taken to





prevent inhalation of dust and any asbestos fibres that may be present if you are contemplating removal of old carpet and underlay.

**Q: Do I need to take precautions if I want to remove old carpet and underlay?**

**A:** Yes, it is advisable to wear a Class P1 or P2 disposable facemask (available at most hardware outlets) and disposable overalls if you are intending to remove old carpet with hair felt underlay (pre 1970). This will provide protection against inhaling dust and other allergens as well as any asbestos fibres in the unlikely event they are present. The carpet and underlay should be carefully, removed to minimise release of dust and particulates. It is advisable to lightly wet down the underside of the carpet and underlay prior to and during removal. This will help to suppress dust.

Alternatively, residents may wish to engage a professional carpet layer to have their carpet and underlay removed and replaced.

If you are concerned about the possibility of asbestos being present in underlay you can have a sample tested by an accredited laboratory. The EHD can provide further advice about this (see contact details over page). The EHD may also arrange for collection of a sample if the carpet underlay is believed to be 'original' material and installed prior to the early 1970s.

**Q: What am I required to do if test results are positive for asbestos?**

**A:** If a positive result for asbestos is received, an officer of the EHD will contact you to discuss the results and any further actions that may be required. However, our findings indicate that while the carpet and underlay remains in situ, it should pose no risk to health. Options for removal are discussed below.

**Q: If I want to have carpet and underlay removed can I do it myself?**

**A:** Providing the precautions (as outlined above) are followed, a householder should be able to safely remove carpet and underlay. *If there is a positive result* for asbestos the EHD will contact the resident to discuss in more detail, procedures for safe removal and disposal. It should be noted that asbestos contaminated waste would need to be wrapped and sealed in plastic, bundles labelled with the words–CAUTION ASBESTOS then taken to a waste facility that accepts asbestos. For advice on location of waste facilities, residents can contact their local government or refer to the following website:

<http://www.dec.wa.gov.au/content/view/2875/1687>

*If there is asbestos present*, the preferred option is for the resident to engage a licensed asbestos removalist to carry out the work. Asbestos removalists can be found by searching the business yellow pages under 'A', or accessing the Department of Commerce website:

[http://www.commerce.wa.gov.au/WorkSafe/PDF/Directories/Licenced\\_asbestos\\_re.pdf](http://www.commerce.wa.gov.au/WorkSafe/PDF/Directories/Licenced_asbestos_re.pdf)





**Q: Can I continue to vacuum my carpet?**

**A:** There is no evidence from the one home where asbestos fibres were found in carpet underlay, that vacuuming or other activity in the affected rooms, has lead to asbestos fibres spreading from underneath the carpet and becoming airborne.

If you are concerned your underlay may contain asbestos, you can have a sample tested as mentioned previously.

**Q: Should I be concerned if I have old hessian bags in my possession?**

**A:** Old hessian bags marked as having contained asbestos should be treated as any other asbestos-contaminated material and handled and disposed of as indicated below. It is not known whether asbestos was also transported in unlabelled hessian bags, so these should also be treated as potentially contaminated and disposed of as such unless the source and prior use of the bags is known.

If a resident has such bags they should be carefully wrapped in plastic or placed into plastic bags, sealed and labelled with the words - CAUTION ASBESTOS and taken to a waste facility that accepts asbestos. See web site link on previous page for location of waste facilities.

**Q: Where can I get further advice or assistance?**

**A:** The EHD is seeking more samples of original hair felt underlay installed prior to the early 1970's in order to further quantify any risk to public health posed by asbestos in carpet underlay.

Please contact the Directorate on 9388 4999 for advice and to determine whether it would be appropriate to arrange for testing of a sample of your carpet underlay.

More information about asbestos in carpet underlay and a picture of felt-style underlay is available at the Department of health's website at:

[http://www.public.health.wa.gov.au/cproot/2463/2/Carpet%20Underlay%20Update\\_2\\_.pdf](http://www.public.health.wa.gov.au/cproot/2463/2/Carpet%20Underlay%20Update_2_.pdf)

