

Tremolite decorative stack-stone wall tiles

This Alert has been issued following WorkSafe Victoria and WorkCover NSW having become aware of the recent importation from China of decorative stack-stone wall tiles that contained asbestos in the form of fibrous tremolite, which is a prohibited hazardous substance.

April 2010

Background

The importation into Australia of the tremolite-containing stack-stone wall tile is believed to have commenced in September 2009. In early February, Australian Customs implemented measures to prevent further importation.

The tile is a bright white colour and has been described variously as 'snow white', 'sparkly white', and 'crystal white', but may be identified by an alternative name or product number.

What is tremolite?

Tremolite is a mineral consisting of elongated, needle-like fibres. It can exist as an 'asbestiform' and a 'non-asbestiform' mineral.

Asbestiform tremolite can cause asbestos-related diseases such as asbestosis, lung cancer and mesothelioma. There is uncertainty about whether non-asbestiform tremolite has the same health risks. Accordingly, precautions are required.

Australian legislation on asbestos does not differentiate between the two forms of tremolite.

Control measures

Importation of tremolite-containing stacked stone wall tiles

Importers of natural stone tiles from China should:

- ask for documentation that verifies the content of the tiles
- ensure they do not import tiles known to contain fibrous tremolite or any other forms of asbestos.

Importers or retailers who suspect they may have obtained tiles that contain fibrous tremolite or other forms of asbestos must stop supply and immediately inform their OHS Regulator.

The suspect material should be tested by an asbestos testing facility accredited by National Association of Testing Authorities (NATA) or be presumed to contain asbestos.

Where tiles are identified or presumed to contain fibrous tremolite (or any other forms of asbestos) they should be sealed using appropriate leak-proof containers and transported according to the environment protection regulator for disposal at a licensed asbestos disposal facility.



Tremolite-containing stacked stone wall tiles. Grooves can be felt on the surface of the plates. Note the elongated crystals in centre piece.

Installed tremolite-containing stacked stone wall tiles

Tremolite-containing tiles already installed within a workplace or home can be left in place as they pose minimal risk when properly maintained and managed.

The presence of these tiles in the workplace should be managed in the same way as any other asbestos-containing material (see further information).

To safely manage installed tremolite-containing tiles:

- apply a clear sealant to minimise the potential for any release of fibres or dust
- for workplaces, include tremolite-containing tiles in an asbestos register and identify the presence of the tremolite-containing tiles by labelling or other means
- notify workers/contractors of the presence of the tremolite-containing tiles when undertaking any repair, maintenance, refurbishment or demolition works.

Note: Never apply power tools, abrasive cutting, sanding disks or high pressure water guns to the tiles.

Working on or removing installed tremolite-containing wall tiles

If necessary to carry out any work (such as drilling or cutting) on installed tremolite-containing tiles, consider removing the tiles.

If this is not practicable, minimise the risks associated with exposure to airborne dust (contact OHS Regulator for advice).

The removal from a workplace must be carried out by a licensed asbestos removalist. A clearance certification must also be issued by an independent and competent person (eg occupational hygienist) to certify that the area is safe for re-occupation if more than 10 square meters of tiles have been removed.

Once removed, the tremolite-containing wall tiles cannot be re-used and must be disposed of as asbestos waste.

Note: While legal for a householder to remove asbestos from their property, it is strongly recommended to use a licensed asbestos removalist.

Refer to guidance on the safe removal of asbestos published by your local council or state health department.

Legal requirements

The importation of all forms of asbestos, including tremolite, is prohibited under the Customs (Prohibited Imports) Regulations 1956. All Australian States and Territories also prohibit the supply, sale, use and re-use of all forms of asbestos through Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) legislation. Transport is only permitted for the purpose of disposal of asbestos-containing material.

Further Information

Related WorkSafe publications

Managing Asbestos in Workplaces, compliance code

Removing Asbestos in the Workplace, compliance code

Other publications

Department of Health, *Asbestos in the home – health and safety, 2010*

Related websites

epa.vic.gov.au/waste/asbestos.asp

customs.gov.au

health.vic.gov.au

Contact details

Call us on: 1800 136 089

Email us at: info@worksafe.vic.gov.au

For more information on occupational health and safety, go to WorkSafe's website: worksafe.vic.gov.au

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