

Community Update

The Local Recovery Committee is continuing the recovery effort following the Wickham Wool Store fire on 1 March.

We've been working hard to clean-up residential properties and public areas (including roads, footpaths and parks) in the areas where asbestos-containing debris has fallen.

More than 300 private residential properties have so far been cleaned and cleared and all evacuated residents have safely returned home.

Public spaces including roads, parks and schools were cleaned as a priority so essential services could continue or get back up and running as soon as possible.

All parks, public roads and footpaths have now been cleaned and cleared (except for Milford Street and Roslyn Avenue near the fire site), which are currently in progress.

What is the impact area?

Asbestos-containing debris from the fire has been identified at various locations extending approximately three kilometres in a north-westerly direction from the fire site.

Air monitoring clear

Since the fire, no airborne asbestos has been detected above the detection limit by asbestos monitors located in the impacted suburbs.

Based on airborne asbestos monitoring and site assessments, there is no evidence to indicate that the community has been exposed to airborne asbestos fibres from the fire above background levels.

Specialist air monitors were installed around the immediate perimeter of the incident site, surrounding streets and suburbs on the morning of 2 March 2022. This monitoring has occurred daily

and to date all airborne asbestos monitoring results have been less than the detection limit of 0.01 fibres/ml air.

Airborne asbestos monitoring will continue throughout the clean-up.

To view air monitoring results please visit [City of Newcastle's website](#).

Understanding the health impacts

NSW Health has provided advice on the health impacts associated with the fire. The risk of adverse health outcomes is dependent on the number of asbestos fibres breathed in and is generally associated with continued exposure to a large number of fibres over long periods of time, more so than 'one-off' events.

During and since the fire, there has been prolonged rainfall, which has helped prevent fibres from becoming airborne. Information from Fire and Rescue NSW rapid assessment reports indicates that asbestos-containing debris from the fire that landed on properties were fragments of non-friable asbestos cement debris, with some loose fibres.

The wetting of debris, either by hoses or by rain, has helped prevent fibres from becoming airborne.

Based on airborne asbestos monitoring and site assessments, there is no evidence to indicate that the community has been exposed to significant airborne asbestos fibres from the fire.

For further advice on common asbestos materials and health information please refer to [City of Newcastle's website](#).

Identifying asbestos

Asbestos specialists have advised that the asbestos is likely to be Super Six, which was previously a commonly used construction material in older buildings and is now banned. The images on page two show some of the asbestos debris from the Wickham fire.



Asbestos debris from the fire. Photo: Hazmat Services

You can also visit the [NSW Government asbestos checker website](#) to find out more.

If you suspect you have asbestos debris from the fire on your property, please call the **EPA's Environment Line** on **131 555**.

How are homes being cleaned up?

Private properties are being assessed and cleaned based on the level of impact – that is, the concentration of asbestos-containing debris found on each property. Homes closest to the fire were most impacted. Properties deemed between a level 1 - most impacted and level 4 - least impacted are being offered an assessment by a

licensed asbestos assessor. Homes assessed as being between level 1 to 3 will be offered an environmental clean by a specialist asbestos removalist.

This clean-up is being managed by Public Works Advisory. Up to 100 contractors have been working on the clean-up. These are all licensed asbestos assessors and removalists.

Level 1: Area has significant quantity and larger-sized pieces of asbestos-containing debris – several pieces of debris with a fragment size greater than the size of a 50-cent coin. A level 1 property would have more than 10 of these sized fragments per square metre.

Level 2: Area has visible asbestos-containing debris (between the size of a 5 to 10 cent coin) and there are 1 to 10 of these fragments per square metre.

Level 3: Area has visible asbestos-containing debris (between the size of a 5 to 10 cent coin) and there is less than 1 fragment per 10 m².

Level 4: Area has visible asbestos-containing debris (between the size of a 5 to 10 cent coin) and there is less than 1 fragment per 100 m².

Registering your property for an assessment by Friday 13 May

If you have not already registered and believe your home is impacted, report your property to the EPA via the Environment Line on 131 555 by **Friday 13 May 2022** so an assessment can be booked.

Complete a form allowing the clean-up contractors access to your property to do the work (Public Works Advisory Deed of Agreement) by **Friday 3 June 2022**.

The Deed of agreement and scope of works must be signed before a licensed asbestos assessor and removalist can enter your property and start the clean-up.

Residents located closest to fire site are being proactively contacted and offered a clean-up.

What gets cleaned in homes?

The environmental clean includes exterior areas of a property. The level of cleaning required depends on the concentration of asbestos-containing debris from the fire. This cleaning program will be

assessed by your assigned licensed asbestos assessor and agreed with you before work commences at your property.

External areas of your property will be cleaned. This includes backyards, balconies, and gutters. The height limit for work on gutters has been determined by safe accessibility. Gutters up to 4.5 metres high can be cleaned.

For information on what clean-up your property may be eligible for, visit [City of Newcastle website](#).

Results of all internal and external air monitoring have been below the detection limit. This demonstrates that asbestos-containing debris is unlikely to have entered residential buildings. The scope of works for the assessment and clean-up action does not include the internal areas of properties.

If you are concerned that visible asbestos-containing debris is inside your home, you may separately contact a licensed asbestos assessor at your own expense for further advice.

To find a licensed asbestos assessor visit <https://verify.licence.nsw.gov.au/>.

When will your home be cleaned?

Once a property is registered with the EPA the resident will be contacted by a licensed asbestos assessor. Assessors are prioritising the clean-up of properties most impacted.

The assessor will arrange a time that is convenient for the property owner to do an inspection. Once the Deed of Agreement and scope of works are signed the clean-up of the property will be scheduled.

The clean-up can take between one to three days depending on the scope of works agreed.

What to do if you find asbestos-containing debris after the clean-up?

If you find asbestos-containing material, in an area that has not been previously assessed or is in an area that has already been cleaned it is an 'unexpected find.'

If you discover an unexpected find on a private property contact the EPA's Environment Line on 131 555.

DO NOT put asbestos waste in red-lid bins or skip bins that aren't meant for asbestos waste.

Properties that have been reported to the EPA will be offered an assessment by a licensed asbestos assessor to provide advice about clean-up. The licensed asbestos assessor may remove the debris if appropriate.

Using a licensed asbestos assessor is the best way to remove unexpected finds. If you choose to remove the asbestos-containing debris yourself you should follow the right procedure to protect yourself. To see the step by step process visit [City of Newcastle's website](#).

SafeWork NSW has developed a series of videos on how to manage asbestos safely: visit <https://bit.ly/3JesFLb>.

If debris is found in public areas, please report it to City of Newcastle via 02 4974 2000 or wickhamfire@ncc.nsw.gov.au.

How are public areas cleaned up?

City of Newcastle is responsible for the removal of asbestos-containing debris in public areas, including roads, footpaths, cycleways, parks, playgrounds and other public spaces and is well-progressed with the clean-up in these areas.

For more information on the clean-up of public areas, see [City of Newcastle's website](#).



Specialist asbestos contractors cleaning up an impacted street.

How were schools cleaned up?

Cleaning of any schools impacted was organised by the Department of Education under its own asbestos management plans. This was done to ensure that essential facilities were back up and running to avoid disruption to the community.

Different methods may have been used to get these facilities cleaned and opened as soon as possible.

Clean-up responsibility

The polluter is responsible for cleaning up following a pollution incident in NSW.

In some emergencies, like this one, clean-up action starts as soon as possible to protect public health and safety and before the responsible party has been identified and asked to pay. Investigations into the responsible party and the cause of the fire are ongoing.

The Local Recovery Committee is leading the recovery effort and is made up of many NSW Government agencies and City of Newcastle. The committee includes:

- City of Newcastle
- NSW Environment Protection Authority
- NSW Public Works Advisory
- NSW Health
- HAZMAT Services
- SafeWork NSW

The recovery effort and the committee's work is guided by the Emergency Asbestos Management Plan (EAMP). The objective is to remove visible asbestos fragments from private residential properties and public domain areas. The **full version** of the EAMP is available at [City of Newcastle's website](#).

More information

City of Newcastle website

www.newcastle.nsw.gov.au/wickhamfire

NSW EPA website

www.epa.nsw.gov.au

EPA Environment Line

131 555

or

info@epa.nsw.gov.au

Mental Health Line

1800 011 511

This is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to everyone in NSW.

Information about asbestos health risks

health.nsw.gov.au

General information about asbestos

asbestos.nsw.gov.au



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