

## FACT SHEET

# ASBESTOS CEMENT WATER PIPES

Asbestos is the name given to a group of fibrous silicate minerals which were mined between the 1940s and 1990 in Australia and overseas for use in many building products. Manufacturing of asbestos products ceased in 1987 and has not been imported or used in Australia since December 2003.



### Use of Asbestos Water Mains

Asbestos has been used in a wide range of cement-based building products such as roofing, wall and fence sheeting and also extensively throughout the water supply networks across Australia. About 33% of all Australian water pipes in service today are made from asbestos cement.

Asbestos cement water pipes have also been used in Singleton between 1960 and the early 1980's. Some 14% (or 40km) of our 283km water supply network is made from asbestos cement pipes which are in very good condition.

### Asbestos Health Risks

Undisturbed asbestos containing materials in good condition do not pose a health risk because asbestos fibres are bound together in solid cement. However, if the material is damaged or crumbling, or is disturbed by breaking, cutting, drilling or sanding, fibres are released into the air and pose a serious health risk when breathed in.

Asbestos fibres when swallowed, however, have not been shown to be harmful. Any asbestos fibres that may be potentially present in drinking water are not considered to be hazardous to human health. (World Health Organisation, National Health and Medical Research Council).

### Guidelines Concerning Asbestos in Drinking Water

The 2011 Australian Drinking Water Guidelines, as published by the National Health and Medical Research Council, provide a factsheet on asbestos in drinking-water. The fact sheet states "There is insufficient data to set a guideline value", "as the weight of evidence indicates that ingested asbestos is not hazardous to health". Also the World Health Organization has concluded that establishing a guideline for asbestos in drinking-water is unnecessary, given the absence of evidence that the ingested asbestos is hazardous to health.

### Web Links

More information on asbestos and drinking water is available in:

- [Australian Drinking Water Guidelines](#)
- [World Health Organization Drinking Water Guidelines](#)

**Asbestos Cement Water Pipe Maintenance**

The effects of asbestos in the water supply have been studied extensively and results show there is no elevated risk of asbestos related diseases from drinking or using water delivered through asbestos cement pipes.

The risks associated with asbestos relate to airborne fibres. Fibres from pipes can become airborne when a pipe is undergoing works, decommissioning or is damaged.

Council ensures all maintenance, replacement and disposal of asbestos cement water pipes is carried out safely, and all relevant regulations are adhered to when handling asbestos cement water pipes to protect the health and safety of employees and the public.

**Guidelines Concerning Asbestos in Drinking Water**

- The condition of all water supply assets, including asbestos cement pipes is monitored closely and pipes are replaced prior to deterioration.
- The 2004 Australian Drinking Water Guidelines and World Health Organisation have not set a guideline value for asbestos due to the absence of evidence that asbestos is hazardous to health in water.
- Asbestos in drinking water may come from a variety of sources including asbestos cement water pipes.
- In Australia more than 33% of all water supplies are delivered using asbestos cement water pipes.
- In Singleton 14% of the 288km water supply network is made from asbestos cement pipes installed between 1960 and the early 1980's.
- Council is gradually replacing asbestos cement water pipes as part of the asset renewal program.

- Any asbestos fibers that potentially make their way into drinking water are not considered to be hazardous to human health.

**RELATED INFORMATION**

- Water Quality Fact Sheet
- [Water and Sewer Group - Customer Service Plan](#)

**FURTHER INFORMATION**

For more information on managing your water account contact Council on:

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