

Asbestos @ Work

Despite a ban on asbestos since 2008, South Africa still has asbestos-containing materials (ACM) in many older buildings as well as naturally occurring asbestos in areas where it was previously mined. Asbestos-containing materials can be found in various building components, including roofs, insulation, gutters and pipes. The presence of these materials poses a potential health risk, particularly during renovations or demolitions where ACMs can be disturbed and release harmful asbestos fibers into the air.

Asbestos-Related Cancer and Noncancer Diseases:

- Mesothelioma (a rare and aggressive cancer that develops in the thin layer of tissue lining internal organs, most commonly the lungs and chest wall)
- Lung cancer
- Asbestosis
- Pleural disease

Research suggests that asbestos exposure could also be linked to cancer in the ovaries, larynx, pharynx, stomach and colorectum.

Companies that own properties that contain asbestos have certain responsibilities under the Asbestos Abatement Regulations, 2020. These include:



IDENTIFICATION & ASBESTOS INVENTORY

Must be performed by a "competent person" who must identify all ACM on site; Inventory must include location, quantity, condition and risk assessment rating of each item.



ASBESTOS RISK ASSESSMENT

Carried out to determine the potential for asbestos fibres to be released into the air; Assessment must include type of ACM, its condition and the potential for disturbance.



MANAGEMENT PLAN

Plan is based on the risk assessment and must outline measures to control exposure; procedures for maintenance, repair and removal of ACM; address emergency procedures as well as training for employees.



SAFE REMOVAL & DISPOSAL

Removal and disposal must be carried out by a registered asbestos contractor; waste must be carefully contained and disposed of at a designated site in accordance with environmental regulations.



ONGOING MANAGEMENT

Regular inspections and monitoring of ACMs are required to ensure continued safe management. Employees must be informed about the location of ACM and the risks associated with it.

Failure to comply with the Asbestos Abatement Regulations can result in fines, imprisonment or other penalties. Employers are ultimately responsible for ensuring compliance, even when work is contracted out.

<https://www.asbestos.com/cancer>
<https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/asbestos/health-effects/index.html>
<https://www.cancer.gov/about-cancer/causes-prevention/risk/substances/asbestos/asbestos-fact-sheet#f8>



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WAREHOUSE ERGONOMICS

Ways to boost efficiency and safety by optimising ergonomics

Warehouses are fast-paced environments where efficiency is everything. However, poor ergonomics can not only lead to physical injuries, but can also have a financial impact on a company, in lost productivity, medical expenses and legal liabilities. Optimising warehouse ergonomics is essential to protect the workforce and improve productivity and revenue.

Poorly Designed Workstations

Workstations should be adjustable, comfortable and designed to minimise unnecessary movements. Repeated stretching, bending or reaching can result in fatigue, discomfort and potential injuries. Minimise excessive bending and improve efficiency (reducing wasted movement) by keeping essential tools within arm's reach. Adjustable-height workstations allow employees of different sizes to work comfortably and reduce strain.

Improper Lifting Techniques

Workers who lift heavy items incorrectly (bending at the waist instead of the knees, or twisting their back while carrying loads) put extreme stress on their spine and muscles. Adequate training, providing lifting aids and encouraging team lifts for heavier loads are some ways to reduce injury.



Poor Housekeeping

Warehouse floors and aisles can often become cluttered with pallets, equipment and other miscellaneous items, which creates a cluttered and unsafe work environment. Not only does this lead to slower workflows and bottlenecks, but also increases the risk of trips and falls. Providing mobile workstation carts to keep essential tools organised and within reach can reduce clutter, increase productivity and minimise hazards.

Repetitive Movements

Movements such as bending, twisting and turning, if performed frequently and without proper techniques or breaks can cause strain on muscles, tendons, nerves and joints, leading to pain, fatigue, discomfort and reduced mobility. Storing high-demand items at waist height, using height-adjustable work surfaces and barcode scanners, and designing work areas where employees can move in straight lines instead of excessive twisting can assist in reducing the risk of strain and injury.

Lack of Fall Hazard Protection

Workers who are reaching too far, standing on unstable surfaces or climbing to retrieve items are more likely to fall, which could lead to serious injuries and damaged inventory. By keeping commonly used products at accessible heights, providing stable platforms and step stools where needed, as well as ensuring clear visibility and non-slip surfaces in work areas can help prevent falls.

Ignoring Worker Feedback and Satisfaction

Workers with access to ergonomic equipment, adequate material handling tools and organised workstations experience less physical fatigue, higher job satisfaction and increased productivity. A well-designed warehouse prioritises worker safety and comfort. In contrast, ignoring ergonomics doesn't just put workers at risk, it also impacts business performance and revenue.

<https://www.ishn.com/articles/114769-fixing-the-hidden-dangers-in-warehouses?v=preview>



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