

2nd December 2020

Dear resident,

Ongoing management of asbestos identified on Omaha Esplanade Reserve

Auckland Council has completed its investigation into the presence of asbestos materials in the soils. Asbestos found predominantly in soils behind the seawall appear to have come from historic coastal structures. Findings highlight that while some pieces are migrating to the surface, most elements are buried to depths of over two meters. Air monitoring has been undertaken, with results identifying very low risk concerns.

Over the past few month's council has had the concerning areas, adjacent to the seawall, fenced off from public access. The focus of this closure has been around trying to establish improved grass coverage, while managing the presence of asbestos pieces at the surface. Recently we removed most of this fencing and reinstated a smaller fence around remaining areas yet to receive adequate vegetative cover. We have also added a protective matting surface to the largest estuary access point, intended to reduce the risk of surface disturbance.

Mowing and other maintenance activities, paused over the past few months, will look to restart under an approved asbestos management plan. Higher grass lengths will be maintained in the areas adjacent to the seawall. This approach is intended to reduce surface disturbance, lessening the chance of uncovering further asbestos elements. Our aim is to put measures in place that ensure worker safety as well as provide for the safety of residents and public who use Esplanade Reserve.

It is important that residents do not undertake mowing on the Esplanade Reserve, particularly nearer the seawall. It is also important that residents do not spray grass along the edge of the seawall because this is the very portion where grass cover must be maintained. The council will ensure that mowing is undertaken consistently along the Esplanade Reserve and appropriate safety measures taken by contractors.

We also need to ensure that the grassed Esplanade area is not traversed by vehicles, trailers and boats as the grass and surface needs to be maintained and is easily disturbed particularly in the drier summer months.

Future remedial actions may include works to provide a more robust and longer-term barrier solution for soils alongside the seawall. Other work may also be needed to protect grass cover in high foot traffic areas.

If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact:

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Yours sincerely,
Auckland Council, Community Facilities.

Further information about the risks and the way that these will be managed is set out below:

When is asbestos a health risk?

Asbestos is a health risk when the smallest asbestos fibres are inhaled deep into a person's lungs. Asbestos containing material such as the fibre cement that has been found, only becomes hazardous when the following conditions are met:

1. The asbestos containing material is in a form that fibres are released to air.
2. The fibres are able to be dispersed into the breathing zone.
3. The fibres are inhaled in high concentrations.

If I breathe in asbestos fibres will I get sick?

Scientific evidence suggests that everyone has breathed in asbestos fibres over their lifetime. People (even those that do not encounter it as part of their work), typically have thousands of asbestos fibres in their lungs because asbestos has been so widely used in the past.

Studies show that it is generally only those that are exposed to very high concentrations of asbestos fibres over a long time get sick as a result. This is most usually only seen in the occupational setting.

What has the council done to check whether this site is safe for use?

The council is undertaking site investigations to determine where the soil contamination appears to be concentrated and the risks that need to be managed for continued safe use of the site. Some areas have been fenced off in preparation for regrassing and other more localised barrier measures to reduce the potential for fibre generation. The council will, where possible, undertake air monitoring to monitor the risk during the works and afterwards to ensure the risks are managed. Future works may also occur to further manage soils along the top of the seawall. The site will operate under an asbestos management plan which will set out health and safety controls for workers, plus management and monitoring of the site.

What controls are required?

Areas requiring ongoing remedial work have been fenced. Mowing will occur at an increased mow height. Health and safety protocols around worker activities particularly soil disturbance and excavations adjacent to the seawall will be in place under an asbestos management plan.