**PRESS RELEASE**

**Asbestos compliance critical in building industry says Indawo**

Asbestos has been used commercially for its desirable physical properties, especially in the building industry. The use of asbestos has increasingly come under intense scrutiny for its health risks to those exposed to its fibres for extended periods. The inhalation of asbestos micro fibres can lead to serious illnesses including lung cancer, mesothelioma and asbestosis, making it critical that contractors are approved asbestos handlers.

According to Indawo Painting and Waterproofing managing director, Peter Jäck, “Asbestos roofing is being been phased out, but many commercial buildings still have asbestos roofs in various states of disintegration. Responsible building owners are slowly replacing the dangerous asbestos sheeting with safer materials, mainly steel, but it is not a simple matter of lifting and replacing. Contractors have to ensure they comply with strict asbestos controls when handling any asbestos containing materials. If the asbestos sheeting is in good condition it poses relatively low risks, however, the material does deteriorate and, when damaged, releases harmful fibres. These microscopic fibres can affect individuals, in and around the building, exposing them to the risk of asbestos-related diseases.”

Replacing asbestos roofing is complex, especially on high-rise commercial buildings with large roof surface areas. The safety of the workforce is of paramount importance. It is not only the height that poses a danger; removing asbestos sheeting releases high levels of asbestos fibres that can be inhaled and attached to clothing, increasing the risk of fibres spreading beyond the site.

Jäck advises that, according to many building owners replacing asbestos roofing, tenants and international investors demand buildings that conform to health and safety standards. He also says that certain industries, like the Food and Beverage Industry, require strict health and safety compliance and need buildings that are asbestos-free. Banks are also more inclined to approve bonds for asbestos-free buildings in which anchor tenants are primarily involved in the food industry as the costs to replace roofing can be high. Shoppers, office and factory workers, are also at risk if they are in or near buildings with deteriorating asbestos roofing.

The process of removing and replacing asbestos roofing involves:

* **Removing asbestos roofing.** Asbestos sheeting must be removed safely. Ground workers must prepare sheets for safe removal offsite by keeping them wet to reduce asbestos fibres spreading, a risk aggravated by strong winds. Removal of the roofing must, preferably, be done at a time when the factory is closed.
* **New roof sheeting.** Safer roofing is available but Jäck reminds building owners that, when replacing roofing with environmentally safe materials, be sure to soundproof the roof against excessive noise created by heavy rain or hail.
* **Cleaning.** Factory floors and the exterior of the building must be kept clean to reduce risks of airborne fibres.
* **Health and Safety.** A health and safety officer must be present to ensure the safety of all workers. Protective clothing and precise disposal methodologies must be adhered to when handling asbestos.

Jäck adds, “Never underestimate the dangers of asbestos. Exposure to its fibres in mining, industrial, commercial and retail workplaces is governed by the Asbestos Regulations published by the Department of Labour. Contractors are legally required to be asbestos compliant prior to accepting projects that involve handling of asbestos. Unfortunately there are still too many non-compliant contractors putting the health of their workers and clients at risk.”

Building owners who do not contract an approved asbestos handler may be jointly liable in the case of injury or harm to a worker or the public. The Occupational Health and Safety Act governs asbestos regulations. For more information and a copy of the Act, visit [www.labour.gov.za](http://www.labour.gov.za) or contact the Department of Labour for a list of approved contractors. All contractors must go through a rigorous application process annually to renew their asbestos compliance certificates.

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