

Frequently asked questions



Churchman Brook Dam playground safety

What is happening?

During a recent inspection of Churchman Brook Dam recreational area, wrapping at the base of a steel pipe in the playground was identified as a potential health and safety risk.

Independent testing was commissioned and this identified positive results for chrysotile (white) asbestos and the chemicals Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbon (PAH) and Polychlorinated Biphenyl (PCB).

The playground equipment and sand was removed and the area further tested to ensure there was no further presence of potentially hazardous materials.

As a precaution, the recreational area at Churchman Brook Dam was closed while we carried out this work.

What were the results of the testing?

An independent review was commissioned immediately through an external consulting group, which identified a low exposure risk to the asbestos.

An additional independent review of the chemicals has been conducted to determine the likelihood of exposure, and also this concluded there was a low exposure risk.

It is important to note that all sampling showed both low levels of detection of these three potentially hazardous materials, as well as a low risk of exposure.

Why has this happened?

Asbestos was used in Western Australia in many building materials up until the 1980s and like many structures in the State, some Water Corporation assets and pipes contain asbestos and other hazardous material. Pipes were wrapped in the protective material to prevent corrosion.

The chemicals were used in a number of industrial products including dyes, inks, plastics and paints.

Historically, decommissioned sections of pipe have been used for display purposes, and in this case, as part of a playground installed in 1997.

How was the section of pipe removed?

Removal of pipe, playground equipment and sand was conducted in a safe manner by a specialised contractor. The material was wrapped prior to being transported by road to a dedicated facility for disposal.

While undertaking this work, approved contractors wore appropriate Personal Protective Equipment. The area was closed to the public and access was restricted. This is standard safe practice.

What is asbestos and why is it no longer used?

Asbestos was a material commonly used in building materials and cement sheets and pipes across a number of decades, most prominently in the 1970s and 1980s.

Asbestos fibres can pose a risk to health if airborne, as inhalation is the main way that asbestos enters the body. It is known to cause illnesses such as asbestosis and mesothelioma.



Small quantities of asbestos fibres are present in the air at all times, and are being breathed by everyone without any ill effects. Most people are exposed to very small amounts of asbestos as they go about their daily lives and do not develop asbestos-related health problems.

What are PAH and PCBs?

Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbons (PAH) and Polychlorinated Biphenyl (PCB) are both organic pollutants which can be found in soils.

PAHs are used in a number of products including medicines, dyes, plastics and pesticides and are also found in the tar that accumulates in the lungs of smokers. The distribution of PAHs in the environment is extensive and people can be exposed to PAHs found in soil, air, water, food or household products.

PCBs were used from the 1930s until the 1970s in a range of industrial products including sealing compounds, ink and paint additives.

I have visited the playground at Churchman Brook Dam, where can I find out more information?

The risk of exposure to these potentially hazardous materials is likely to be low because it would be for short, infrequent periods but we understand that people who have visited the playground and used the equipment may be concerned.

For any health related enquiries contact HealthDirect on 1800 022 222, or speak to your doctor. For more information on asbestos see the Healthy WA website [healthywa asbestos](#) or the Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency and its [National Asbestos Exposure Register](#).

A factsheet on PAHs can be found at <https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/toxfaqs/tf.asp?id=121&tid=25>

A factsheet on PCBs can be found at <https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/toxfaqs/tf.asp?id=528&tid=94>

What is Water Corporation doing to ensure there aren't any other hazardous materials at its dams around the state?

Water Corporation is undertaking thorough inspections of all its playgrounds to ensure any potentially hazardous materials are identified, and if necessary, are safely removed.

Is there a risk to the water supplied from the dam?

There is no risk to the water supply at Churchman Brook Dam.

Will you replace the playground equipment?

We will replace the playground equipment and will consider a number of options for the area, including moving the playground closer to the picnic facilities. In the meantime, the area has been remediated with new sand and will remain closed until new equipment is installed.

Where can I get more information?

If you would like to get in contact with Water Corporation about the playground area or recreational areas at any of our dams, please call 13 13 75.