

Mad about Magnesite?

What is Magnesite Flooring?

Magnesite flooring was commonly installed in Australia throughout the 1960's and up until the early 1980's. It involved the mixing of magnesium oxychloride cement with organic fillers, and was installed as a slab topping or as a self-levelling topping to prepare the slab for the installation of other type of floor coverings such as carpet or tiles.

Issues with Magnesite Flooring

The major issue with magnesite flooring is that it can cause concrete cancer if it is affected by water ingress. Magnesite flooring in wet areas such as balconies, bathrooms and kitchens will retain any moisture that exists in those areas. Once it become significantly moist, the chlorides in the magnesium oxychloride begins to seep out of the magnesite flooring and into the concrete slab below, causing corrosion to the reinforcement bars within the concrete.

The corrosion causes two issues. First, the steel in the concrete will begin to expand causing the concrete slab and magnesite flooring to crack and in turn causing the floor to become uneven or tiles installed on top of the magnesite flooring to crack or pop out. Secondly, the concrete slab will lose its structural integrity over time which could lead to the collapse of the slab.

Who is Responsible to Remediate Magnesite Flooring in a Strata Scheme?

The responsibility to repair the damage will depend on whether the magnesite is lot property or common property. Magnesite flooring is typically common property and as such, it will usually be the responsibility of the owners corporation to remediate the damaged concrete slabs.

As concrete cancer will eventually cause structural issues, works to remediate damaged concrete need to be done as soon as possible and cannot be delayed. Any delay will only lead to more damage and therefore an increase in costs and risk for the owners corporation.

Asbestos in Magnesite Flooring

Typically magnesite flooring does not contain asbestos however it has been found in some magnesite floors.

An owners corporation could be liable for diseases found to be caused by the asbestos in magnesite flooring if the magnesite flooring is common property. To stop the possibility of claims being made against the strata scheme, the strata scheme will need to have an up-to-date asbestos register, asbestos management plan and emergency procedures. Having this documentation may be a legal requirement for some strata schemes.

The removal of any magnesite flooring that contain asbestos will need to follow an existing asbestos management plan and if one does not exist, one will need to be created to specifically manage such works.

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