

When the Tide Goes Out

An asbestos risk evaluation for ACM
on an urban beach

Michael Mechaelis - Project Director | Tonkin + Taylor

James Corbett - Principal Contaminated Land Specialist | Auckland Council

The Bluff beach battling asbestos

1:05 pm on 16 February 2026

Share this     

 **Matthew Rosenberg**, Local Democracy Reporter
matthew.rosenberg@odt.co.nz

Why are Darwin's beaches dotted with asbestos and what's being done to get rid of it?

By Neda Vanovac

Asbestos

Tue 12 Jun 2018



[OceanBeachBulletin](#)
YOUR GREAT SEASIDE RESERVE

[HOME](#) [ABOUT](#) [DESTINATIONS](#) [BEACH TIPS](#) [BEST BEACHES IN THE WORLD](#)



As coastal communities boast the serenity of oceanfront living, there's an environmental concern lurking beneath the surface: asbestos. While many associate asbestos hazards with construction materials, its impact on coastal areas poses unique challenges. In this article, we'll delve deeper into the environmental repercussions of asbestos in these settings and underscore the importance of professional [asbestos abatement services](#) in mitigating these concerns.



Asbestos on Darwin's beaches are relatively common. (ABC News: Neda Vanovac)

WELLINGTON > BUSINESS

Biohazards in paradise: asbesto fragments on Wellington beaches

May 4, 2021 [3 comments](#)



Wellington.Scoop report by Mary Argue
Building waste fragments suspected to contain asbestos have been found on a popular beach track near Seatoun in Wellington. Local Anne Taylor was left feeling "gutted" after her discovery while walking in the Oruaiti Reserve, east of Seatoun beach.

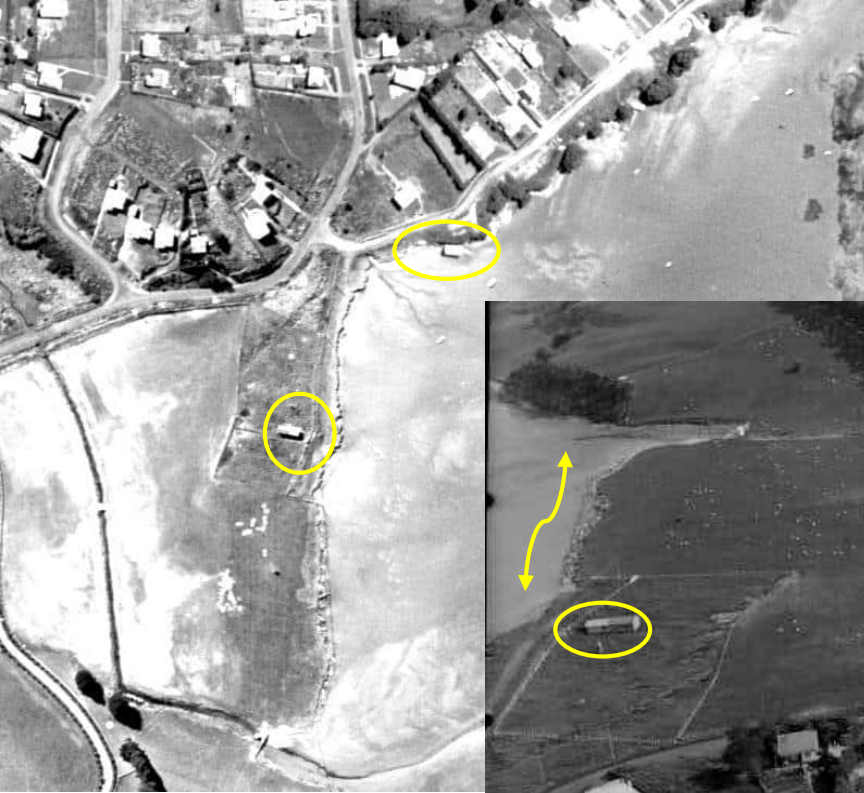
Glendowie Bay East Auckland

- Coastal Marine Area (CMA)
- Extensive sandy flats
- East - Roberta Reserve/ seawall
- South-east - Bird sanctuary
- North/ South - cliff faces

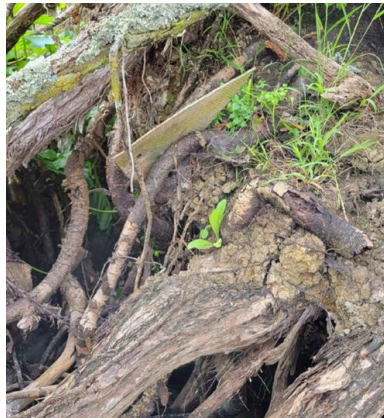


- History of ACM at surface
 - Public concern
 - Ongoing survey/ management
1. Where is/are the ACM sources?
 2. How is ACM being transported into/around the Bay?
 3. What risks to human health?
 4. How to manage?

Potential sources 1940's/1960's/1970's



Potential sources



Site Investigation

- 26 sand + sediment samples contained ACM
- Potential exceedance Bonded ACM BRANZ Tier 1 guidelines
- AF/FA <0.001% w/w



Risk Assessment

- Moisture content >10% in the dryest samples collected (14.6-37%)
- Based on Dutch asbestos in soil study there is low risk of ACM generating fibres that will become airborne

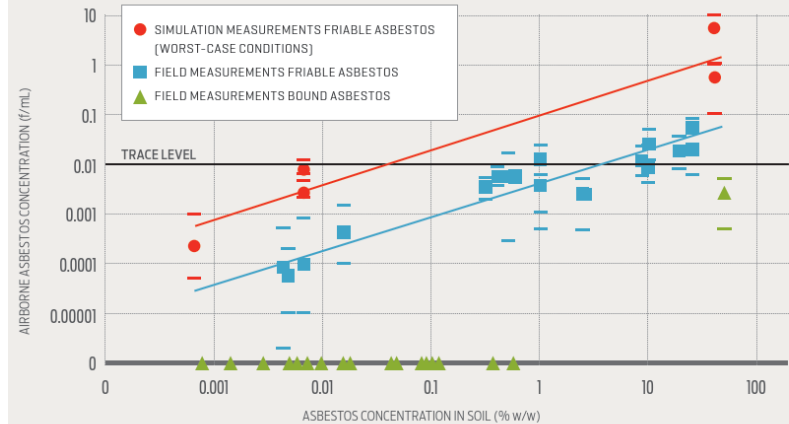


Figure 12. Asbestos fibre release in simulated and field measurements.

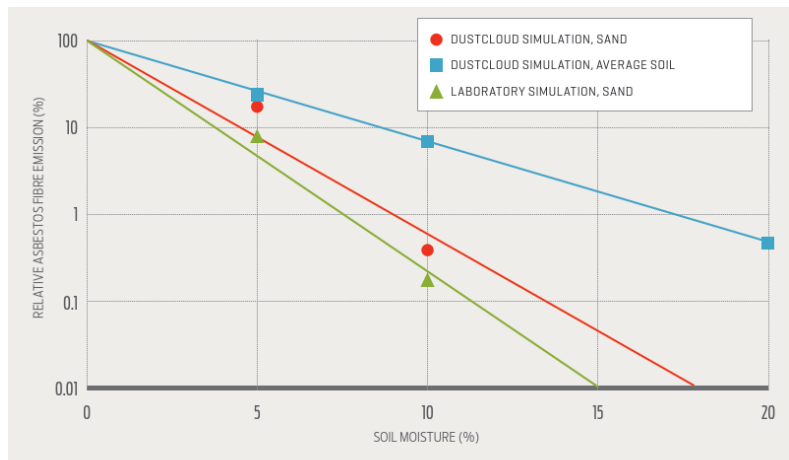


Figure 15. Asbestos fibre release in soils with differing moisture/water content.





2025 site area

Approximate areas of the site
where ACM is being discovered

The site covers 77,800m²

Fly-tipping and uncontrolled filling was identified as significant source, to the impacts of North Bay, though bank erosion over time

Indicative bank changes timeline

Green 1940

Blue 1950

Yellow 1960

Orange 1970

Pink 1990

Grey 2010/ 11

Red 2024/ 25

Repeat accumulations
seen in NE part of the site
Why?

Tethered token modelling



Outcomes

Confirmed sources of ACM

- fill in eroding cliff banks
- historical formwork under footbridge
- tidal mobilisation; current accumulation

Bonded ACM <0.1% w/w

- Accumulation over time may exceed BRANZ

AF/FA < 0.001% w/w

BRANZ Tier 1 asbestos-in-soil risk thresholds deemed overly conservative for this setting based on investigation results.



Next Steps

- Liaison with Community engagement around findings
- Targeted action - known sources
- Management plan for ongoing periodic removals in Bay

Other Considerations

- Public expectations/risk communication
- Investment in regard to risk
- Potential application of learnings to other areas
- Ongoing engagement with senior management



Kia mataara
Attention
Auckland public health information

Auckland Council and Health NZ are currently investigating the presence of Asbestos Containing Material (ACM) on this beach. Most of the ACM has been removed but there may still be small amounts present. ACM may also continue to become exposed due to weather and tidal influences.

The risk posed by the ACM is considered extremely low if it is left undisturbed. Public are warned not to handle or attempt to remove it from the beach. The ACM is in the form of fiber cement board (see examples below).



For more information, please contact Auckland Council's Environmental Health Enforcement Team on **09 301 0101** or email Healthenforcement@aucklandcouncil.govt.nz.

Health New Zealand
Te Whenua o Te Whaiti

Auckland Council
Te Kaitiaki o Te Whaiti

