

Communication 018/2026

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Asbestos in play sand: Further data required for risk assessment

Reports have emerged from various states regarding a suspected contamination of play and craft sand with asbestos. Inhaling asbestos fibres can lead to illness. The German Federal Institute for Risk Assessment (BfR) currently has no information which products in Germany are affected or what asbestos levels are present in the affected products. Therefore, conducting a risk assessment is not possible at this time. The Institute is in close contact with the responsible national authorities and EU Member States regarding this issue.

Play and craft sand should not be confused with sand in sandpits on playgrounds. This is not affected. Play and craft sand is sold in small packages and is intended for indoor play and craft activities.

Asbestos is the collective name for various naturally occurring fibrous silicate minerals with fibre diameters of up to 2 micrometres. The substance was used in very large amounts in the construction industry for decades. Its manufacture and use have been strictly regulated throughout the EU since 2005, as the substance can cause various types of cancer. The use of asbestos in toys and consumer goods is prohibited.

In November 2025, reports emerged in Australia and New Zealand of play and craft sand contaminated with asbestos. In February 2026, play and craft sand products containing traces of asbestos were found in the Netherlands and Belgium, and the products were withdrawn from the market and recalled from retailers as a precautionary measure. All of the products affected had small amounts of play and craft sand (coloured, "magic", malleable/kinetic), which were often purchased online. The recalls also affect sand-filled stretchy toy figures/stretch figures. Play and craft sand is different from sand for sandboxes. The latter is not affected.

There are currently no confirmed reports with reliable data on asbestos-containing play and craft sand products that were regularly sold in Germany (as of 25 February 2026). However, various retailers have recalled products as a precautionary measure.

The BfR therefore currently has no findings relevant to risk assessment concerning asbestos in play sand. There are also currently no measurements that could be used for a risk assessment with regard to children's exposure to airborne asbestos from play sand products. As soon as reliable information on the possible presence of asbestos-related impurities in play and craft sand becomes available from the regional authorities of the German federal states ("Laender"), the BfR will assess the health risks. However, the BfR's legal mandate does not include the assessment of individual products or brands.

The BfR is responsible for conducting risk assessment of toys in Germany. The Federal Environment Agency (UBA) deals with indoor air quality. This is relevant to asbestos because the fibres are taken up from the air through respiration.

Detailed information on asbestos is available on the website of the German Social Accident Insurance Institution for the construction industry (BG Bau).

Preliminary health risk assessment from Belgium

The Belgian government has carried out a risk assessment. This assessment by the federal scientific institution Sciensano concludes that the concentrations detected in official Belgian samples of children's play sand are "negligible from a healthperspective" ("gezondheidskundig verwaarloosbaar"). However, the authority points out that this statement is very uncertain, partly due to the limited data available, and may change if better data becomes available. The risk assessment is based on the asbestos levels in three products. A total of 15 samples were tested in Belgium, of which asbestos was not detectable in twelve products. It is emphasised that the samples taken are not representative. In general, inhaling asbestos fibres is considered harmful to health.

According to Sciensano's investigation the detection of asbestos in play and craft sand is not surprising, as it has been found in other consumer products containing mineral raw materials in the past. Asbestos is a naturally occurring mineral that can be found in a wide variety of mineral deposits, such as rock and sand quarries. Mining of these mineral deposits can lead to asbestos contamination of the mined sand.

International hazard classification of asbestos

The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) of the World Health Organisation (WHO) classified inhaled asbestos fibres as a Group 1 carcinogen (sufficient evidence of carcinogenicity in humans). Asbestos causes various types of cancer and, in cases of chronic exposure, the occupational disease asbestosis, in which inflammation causes scarring of the lung tissue.

There are essentially two groups of asbestos, serpentine (chrysotile) and amphibole (crocidolite, amosite, tremolite, actinolite and anthophyllite), with amphibole types of asbestos considered particularly problematic. All of the above types of asbestos are classified as Category 1A carcinogens (substances known to be carcinogenic to humans) in accordance with European Regulation (EC) No 1272/2008.

Asbestos has long been strictly regulated and banned in the EU. Consumer goods must comply with the requirements of the EU REACH Regulation and the EU Product Safety Regulation. Play sand products in particular are subject to the European Toy Safety Directive 2009/48/EC, which is still applicable, and, in the future, to the new European Toy Safety

Regulation (EU) 2025/2509. According to legal requirements, consumer products, including toys, must be safe.

Further information on toys is available on the BfR website

[Topic page on the health risk assessment of toys](#)

About the BfR

The German Federal Institute for Risk Assessment (BfR) is a scientifically independent institution within the portfolio of the German Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Regional Identity (BMLEH). It protects people's health preventively in the fields of public health and veterinary public health. The BfR provides advice to the Federal Government as well as the Federal States ('Laender') on questions related to food, feed, chemical and product safety. The BfR conducts its own research on topics closely related to its assessment tasks.

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Publisher:

German Federal Institute for Risk Assessment

Max-Dohrn-Straße 8-10

10589 Berlin, Germany

T +49 30 18412-0

F +49 30 18412-99099

bfr@bfr.bund.de

bfr.bund.de/en

Institution under public law

Represented by the President Professor Dr Dr Dr h. c. Andreas Hensel

Supervisory Authority: Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Regional Identity

VAT ID No. DE 165 893 448

Responsible according to the German Press Law: Dr Suzan Fiack



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