

Inside

Simple home improvements such as ripping up carpet or painting can seem like ideal DIY projects, but there can be a serious risk of exposing yourself and your family to lead and asbestos from the removal of old surfaces in houses built prior to 1970. Lead and asbestos can have long-term ill-effects on your family's health, so take the time to test for these materials and carefully follow instructions on how to safely remove and dispose of them.

one

Carpet laid between the 1950s and 1970s may possibly be laid over underlay constructed from hessian bags that were used to transport asbestos. This underlay looks brown, hairy and fibrous, and should be treated with caution. A sample of the underlay can be sent away for testing and if asbestos is found, then it should be removed following guidelines for using appropriate masks, clothing and protective equipment, ensuring residents, neighbours and pets are not exposed. The waste and materials used for removal need to be disposed of properly at the location recommended by your local environmental protection agency.

epa.vic.gov.au/your-environment/waste/asbestos

asbestos.vic.gov.au/about-asbestos

epa.nsw.gov.au/waste/asbestos

health.qld.gov.au/asbestos

two

If your carpet underlay is benign and you are removing large areas that are still in good condition, cut these into useable pieces that can be re-sold or given away. Alternatively, old carpets make excellent permeable mulching surfaces for garden beds. They are especially useful to kill off large patches of grass or weeds to create new garden beds or to cover a compost heap. Woolen carpets used this way can have a mulch layer added over the top and will eventually decompose. If you are laying new carpet look for companies that take back and recycle their products to ensure they are never incinerated or end up in landfill.

salvagebazaar.com.au

gumfree.com.au

cavbrem.com.au

interfaceflor.com.au

velleris.com

three

It is interesting to think about our willingness to spend the same on a piece of furniture that we would on a TV or new appliance. This is despite knowing an appliance will be obsolete within a decade or so while furniture that is classically designed and well crafted may remain so for generations. Look for solid pieces constructed from high quality materials. Handcrafted and natural materials are likely to retain value and survive the whims of interior fashion. Hardwood timbers, strong joints and surfaces/upholstery that can be easily renovated and replaced increase the longevity of pieces.

four

When you buy a salvaged piece of painted furniture or architectural feature it could contain lead paint. If the surface or paint is not broken, using an undercoat/sealant over the top to encapsulate the lead is the safest way to deal with it. However, if paint is peeling or flaking you will need to safely remove it to prevent the lead from becoming airborne in your home. A chemical paint stripper and a scraper may be used to soften and scrape paint directly into plastic bags. This job can be done at home provided you wear disposable clothing and masks, cover the surrounding area with drop cloths and work in a well ventilated area. Everything used, including the removed paint, should be wrapped in a thick black plastic bag and sealed well before disposal. Another option that is useful if you want to take the surface back to timber, is to have the item professionally stripped in a chemical solution.

peelaway.com.au

five

The alternative to heirloom furnishings is biodegradable furniture that was designed not to last. Examples are items made from recycled or compostable lightweight materials, or that use components that can be disassembled and re-used. These types of adaptive use furniture innovations are excellent when you need flexibility in your life, such as beds that change size, or side tables that are also stools. If you are going to purposely buy something to "do for now" then rather than buying a poorly made product from a cheap furniture chain, why not buy a piece of furniture that will biodegrade when it's served its purpose?

kartongroup.com

