

H&S Information Sheet #12

Asbestos

What is Asbestos?

Asbestos is made of minerals containing long thin fibrous crystals. It was a popular building material due to its resistance to heat, electricity and chemical damage, as well as its sound absorption and tensile strength.

Although it is now illegal to use asbestos in the construction or refurbishment of any premises, many thousands of tonnes of it were used in the past and much of it is still in place. As long as it is in good condition and is not being or going to be disturbed or damaged, there is no risk. But if it is disturbed or damaged, it can become a danger to health, because asbestos fibres are released into the air and people can breathe them in.

Exposure to Asbestos

Past exposure to asbestos currently kills 3000 a year in Great Britain and this number is expected to rise for the next 10 years. There is no cure for asbestos-related diseases, mainly cancers of the lungs and chest lining.

There is usually a long delay between first exposure to asbestos and the onset of disease. This can vary from 15 to 60 years. Only by preventing or minimising these exposures now will asbestos-related disease eventually be wiped out.

Anyone whose work involves drilling, sawing or cutting into the fabric of premises could potentially be at risk. They may all breathe in asbestos fibres during their day-to-day work.

It is possible that repeated low exposures, such as those which could occur during routine repair work, may also lead to cancers.

The scientific evidence on exactly what exposures cause disease is unclear. But it is known that the more asbestos fibres breathed in, the greater the risk to health.

That is why it is important that asbestos-containing materials (ACMs) are identified and that everyone who works with them should take appropriate precautions.

The 3 main types of asbestos are commonly known as:

- **Blue**
- **Brown**
- **White**

All are dangerous, but blue and brown asbestos are more hazardous than white. They cannot be identified just by their colour.

Some ACMs are more vulnerable and more likely to give off fibres than others. In general, the materials which contain a high percentage of asbestos are more easily damaged.

Sprayed coatings, lagging and insulating board are more likely to contain blue or brown asbestos. Asbestos insulation and lagging can contain up to 85% asbestos and are most likely to give off fibres. Work with asbestos insulating board can result in equally high fibre release if power tools are used.

Asbestos cement contains only 10-15% asbestos. The asbestos is tightly bound into the cement and the material will only give off fibres if it is badly damaged or broken.

Where to find asbestos

The most likely places to find it are:

- Sprayed asbestos and asbestos loose packing – generally used as fire breaks in ceiling voids
- Moulded or pre-formed lagging – usually in thermal insulation of pipes and boilers
- Sprayed asbestos – generally used as fire protection in ducts, firebreaks, panels, partitions, soffit boards, ceiling panels and around structural steel work
- Insulating boards used for fire protection, thermal insulation, partitioning and ducts
- Some ceiling tiles and vinyl or thermoplastic floor tiles
- Certain textured coatings

- Millboard, paper and paper products used for insulation of electrical equipment. Asbestos paper has also been used as a fire-proof facing on wood fibreboard
- Asbestos cement products, which can be fully or semi-compressed into flat or corrugated sheets. Corrugated sheets are largely used as roofing and wall cladding. Other asbestos cement products include gutters, rainwater pipes and water tanks
- Bitumen roofing material

Other places where asbestos may be found, particularly in charity shops, are:

- Iron stands on ironing boards
- Rope seals (e.g. on fire-proof safes)
- Storage and hot air heaters
- Bitumen sink pads
- Cold water WC systems

ACMs may be present if the building was constructed or refurbished before blue and brown asbestos were banned in 1985. In some cases ACMs, such as asbestos cement, were used up until 1999. Asbestos is unlikely to be present in buildings constructed after 2000.

The Control of Asbestos Regulations (2006) continue to ban the second-hand use of asbestos products such as asbestos cement sheets and asbestos boards and tiles. This also includes panels which have been covered with paint or textured plaster containing asbestos.

The Duty to Manage Asbestos

The Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations contain a duty to manage asbestos. It applies to those who have maintenance and repair responsibilities for non-domestic premises either through a contract or tenancy agreement or because they own the premises.

The duty holder is required to:

- Find out if asbestos is in the premises, its amount and what condition it is in
- Presume materials contain asbestos, unless there is strong evidence that they do not

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- Make and keep up to date a record of the location and condition of the ACMs or presumed ACMs on the premises
- Assess the risk from the material
- Prepare a plan detailing how the risk from this material is to be managed and take the steps needed to put the plan into action
- Review and monitor the plan and the arrangements made to put it in place
- Provide information on the location and condition of the material to anyone who is liable to work on or disturb it

Anyone who has information on the whereabouts of asbestos on the premises is required to make this available to the dutyholder.

Those who are not dutyholders, but control access to the premises, would have to co-operate in managing the asbestos.

Asbestos Surveys

The Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations define 3 types of survey for identifying, sampling and assessing ACMs.

Type 1: Location and assessment survey

This survey is presumptive, and does not require any samples of suspect material to be tested. It simply entails locating as far as is reasonably practicable the presence and extent of any suspect ACMs in the building.

Some material obviously does not contain asbestos, such as glass, solid wooden doors, floorboards, bricks and stone. **If there are any doubts about any of the material in your premises, you must presume it contains asbestos.**

Type 2: Standard sampling, identification and assessment survey

This survey differs from the first type in that suspect materials are sampled and the results tested for the presence of ACMs. Other materials within the building that are similar to those sampled and found to contain ACMs should be recorded as strongly presumed to contain asbestos.

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Type 3: Full access sampling and identification survey

This survey is generally only required prior to major refurbishment of the building or prior to the demolition of the structure. It requires invasive or destructive techniques for inspection.

Charity retailers are advised to obtain a copy of the landlord's Type 2 survey and to ask the vendor or landlord for such when acquiring a new property. If it cannot be provided, or if it is inadequate, a new Type 2 survey should be commissioned, preferably at the landlord or vendor's expense.

Competent Surveyors and Analysts

Surveys should be undertaken by a competent company, e.g. laboratory analysts, suitably trained building surveyors or specialist asbestos removal contractors, with appropriate accreditation/certification and insurance. They are likely to be members of ATAC, CHAS, BSC or CHSH.

Firms are generally listed in Yellow Pages and other business directories. Those who look at samples are listed under 'laboratories' or 'analytical research chemists'.

The United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS) has an accreditation scheme for organisations that do asbestos surveys and for those that sample and analyse asbestos in materials. For surveys it is UKAS ISO 17020 / EN 45004 and for sampling and analysis it is UKAS ISO 17025 / EN 45001.

An accredited company is likely to employ suitably trained people for these types of work. Some firms will only be qualified to do surveys and take samples and others only to analyse samples. (*See Further Information for how to contact UKAS.*)

Some trade and professional organisations have accredited personnel certification schemes for individuals who undertake asbestos surveys. Personnel certification schemes do not necessarily look at the quality of the procedures and systems used by the whole organisation, whereas the UKAS accreditation scheme does.

It is advisable to ask the person or organisation:

- For evidence of their training and experience in such work

- Whether they are going to carry out the survey in accordance with the HSE guidance MDHS100 *Surveying, sampling and assessment of asbestos-containing materials*
- For evidence that they have suitable liability insurance

The quality of surveys can vary, so it is recommended that charities check references and ask to see copies of past surveys. These surveys need to be easily read by a contractor.

It is helpful if the surveys are consistent in their format and approach. It is also helpful, when commissioning a Type 2 survey, to ask the contractor to label the materials that contain asbestos when he carries out the survey.

Asbestos Records

A Type 2 survey should contain a drawing showing where the asbestos or presumed asbestos is, the type if known, its form, the amount and what condition it is in. The drawing should be simple and clear.

It is advisable to ask for at least two copies of each Type 2 survey. One should be kept available at the premises, in a Property Log Book or a similar file, and a second should be held at Head Office.

A third may be required (perhaps in electronic or paper format) for the person who will be responsible for ensuring that all necessary works identified in the report are included in planned maintenance programmes.

Assessing the Potential Risk

Although a competent company may be appointed to carry out all or part of the work to meet the requirements, the dutyholder will have to be involved in the final assessment of the potential risk. It is he who will know how the premises are used and what disturbance is likely to occur.

The likelihood of each ACM being disturbed will be assessed by considering:

- Information gathered on the location, amount and condition of the ACM
- If the ACM is in a position where it is likely to be disturbed

- How much ACM is present
- If there is easy access to the ACM
- Whether people work near the ACM in a way that is liable to disturb it
- If it is close to areas in which people normally work when it is disturbed
- The numbers of people who use the area where the ACM is
- If maintenance work, refurbishment or other work on the premises is likely to be carried out where the ACM is

A plan to manage these risks will need to be prepared and implemented.

If there is disturbed or damaged asbestos it may be necessary immediately to close the premises and arrange for its removal by a competent contractor. Otherwise it should be repaired, sealed, or enclosed.

If the asbestos is in good condition, not likely to be damaged and not likely to be worked on or disturbed, it is usually safer to leave it in place and manage it.

Managing Asbestos Left in Place

A copy of the survey containing a drawing recording the location of ACMs or presumed ACMs that are in good condition should be kept on site and kept up to date. Updates would comprise details of monitoring, air quality tests, work carried out to asbestos etc.

Everyone who needs to know about the asbestos must be effectively alerted to its presence. Anyone installing telephones, computers or electrical equipment may also need to be told as they may disturb asbestos.

Where practical the material should be labelled clearly with the asbestos warning sign – such as that pictured below – or some other system (e.g. colour coding).



A permit-to-work system or some other method of controlling access to the premises should be introduced. This would ensure that no one is allowed to work on the premises unless they have been given the relevant information on any asbestos present to prevent it being accidentally disturbed.

Each Oxfam shop has a copy of the survey and asbestos register on site and this has to be shown to all contractors, who must sign it to confirm they have read it. All works order sheets issued by Oxfam's surveyors to contractors state that the contractors should consult the asbestos register before starting work.

Removal

When asbestos is removed, there should be an air fibre test carried out by an independent air sampling contractor on completion of the work. The air quality tester will provide a certificate confirming that the environment is safe from asbestos fibres.

As with the Type 2 surveys, at least 2 copies of the air quality test should be obtained – one for retaining on site and one for Head Office.

Monitoring

The dutyholder should have an effective plan for inspecting ACMs left in place, including those that have been sealed or enclosed, to make sure that their condition has not changed.

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The time between inspections will depend on the type of material, where it is and its condition, but it should be at least every 6 to 12 months.

The asbestos records kept on site and at Head Office must be updated if any circumstances change.

A periodic review of the plan to manage asbestos risks should be undertaken. This would include checks that the arrangements to control the risks have been put in place and are working effectively. The plan should be reviewed if there are significant changes that will affect these arrangements.

Information, Instruction and Training

The Regulations require mandatory training for anyone who is liable to be exposed to asbestos fibres at work (e.g. maintenance workers) or who supervise such employees.

They need to be aware of such things as:

- The effects of asbestos on health, including its interaction with smoking
- Materials likely to contain asbestos
- Preventive controls to minimise exposure
- Safe work practices/protective equipment
- Emergency procedures and hygiene requirements
- De-contamination and waste handling procedures

Working on ACMs

The dutyholder must make sure that any contractor who is about to work on ACMs sees the Asbestos Register and knows what precautions he and his workers must take.

The contractor must:

- ✓ Keep everyone out of the work area who does not need to be there
- ✓ Take care not to create dust
- ✓ Keep the material wet, whenever possible
- ✓ Wear a suitable respirator and protective clothing
- ✓ Clean up with an industrial vacuum cleaner – BS 5415 (Type 'H')

The contractor must not:

- × Break up large pieces of asbestos material
- × Use high-speed power tools – they create high levels of dust
- × Expose other workers who are not protected
- × Take protective clothing home to wash

Disposal of Asbestos

Asbestos waste, no matter how small the amount, is subject to waste management controls. Asbestos waste should be double-bagged in heavy duty polythene bags and clearly labelled with the label prescribed for asbestos. It must be transported by a conveyor who has a licence to do so. The waste can only be disposed of at a site licensed to receive it.

The contractor must ensure that there is proper disposal of asbestos and should report to the dutyholder on how the disposal has taken place.

Further Information

A Short Guide to Managing Asbestos in Premises. HSE leaflet INDG 223REV3

Asbestos Essentials Task Manual: Task guidance sheets for the building maintenance and allied trades. HSE Books ISBN 0 7176 6263 0

Surveying, sampling and assessment of asbestos-containing material. HSE Books ISBN 0 7176 2076 X

United Kingdom Accreditation Service.

Tel: 020 8917 8400

Email: info@ukas.com

Website: www.ukas.com

Asbestos Removal Contractors Association (ARCA).

Tel: 01283 531126

Email: info@arca.org.uk

Website: www.arcaweb.org.uk

The Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS).

Fax: 020 7334 3844

Email: asbestos@rics.org.uk

Website: www.rics.org

ASBESTOS ACTION SUMMARY

MINOR DAMAGE	GOOD CONDITION
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Repair and/or encapsulate the material• Monitor the condition of the material at regular intervals. Where practical, label the material• Inform the contractor and any other worker likely to work on or disturb the material	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Monitor the condition of the material at regular intervals• Where practical label the material• Inform the contractor and any other worker likely to work on or disturb the material
POOR CONDITION	ASBESTOS DISTURBED
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Remove asbestos in poor condition	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Remove asbestos likely to be disturbed