

Norwich Union Risk Services

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Asbestos in Buildings

There are several types of asbestos likely to be present in buildings, including chrysotile (white); crocidolite (blue); and amosite (brown). Asbestos causes a range of diseases including asbestosis and mesothelioma. Asbestos is the single biggest cause of work related illness, though the diseases will often not appear until many years after exposure.

Asbestos was widely used as a material in the building industry in the 60's and 70's and is still now present in many buildings. It was used as a lagging material for pipework and structural steelwork, as well as in asbestos boarding for providing fire protection in walls and doors, and in asbestos cement roofing and cladding.

It is the free fibres floating in the air which may be inhaled into the lungs that cause the damage, and it is therefore very important to avoid any task that could disturb the asbestos and produce a release of asbestos fibres.

Identifying Asbestos

Even though the types of asbestos are commonly known by their colour, (blue, brown and white) asbestos containing materials (ACMs) cannot be identified by colour alone. The first step is to identify the materials that may contain asbestos.

- **Asbestos Cement** is a grey, brittle material that contains 10-15% asbestos fibres. As well as being found in cladding and roofing materials (including guttering) it is also found in pipes and flues.
- **Asbestos Boarding** contains up to 40% asbestos and the board can be pale grey and of varying thickness. It is no longer available in this country but was used extensively for creating walls, linings, ceiling tiles, and partitions, particularly for fire protection purposes.

- **Sprayed Asbestos** can consist of up to 85% asbestos mixed in with a variety of other materials. The material is often quite loose and can easily give risk to asbestos dust.
- **Other Materials** include certain types of textured coatings and asbestos paper used for insulating wooden boards and electrical equipment.

In all cases, the asbestos containing material (ACM) may be painted, encapsulated or covered to protect it. Identifying asbestos is not easy and there is a possibility that the material may be disturbed in maintenance or refurbishment work. The only way to positively identify a material as asbestos is by having it analysed by a reputable laboratory. Samples should only be taken by suitably trained people and analysed by a laboratory that is a member of the United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS).

Condition of the ACM

The chance of asbestos fibres being released into the air will be increased if the ACM:

- is located where it could be knocked or bumped
- is located where it may be worked upon (e.g. where someone may drill holes in it for pipes or cables)
- surface is breaking up or is damaged or cracked
- material has become detached from the structure or item it is protecting (e.g. a steel girder or pipe).

If there are signs of dust or debris in the immediate area and if the ACM is in a poor condition, then it will need to be sealed, enclosed or removed urgently.

Removal or Repair

If the ACM will always be prone to damage or is difficult to repair it will need to be removed. Asbestos lagging and insulation can only be removed or sealed by a contractor that has been licensed by the Health and Safety Executive, and will probably be a member company of the Asbestos Removal Contractors' Association (ARCA).

If the ACM is in good condition, or can be sealed or protected, it should be clearly marked with the asbestos warning sign. Keep a note of the location of ACMs and mark it on building plans.

ACMs that are left in place should be periodically inspected to check on its condition. Keep a register of the location of ACMs and the type of asbestos (if known). It may be helpful to record any materials that have been tested and found not to contain asbestos, in case they are called into question again.

Notifying Contractors and Workers

It is important that any employees and contractors who are involved with building maintenance are informed of the location of ACMs. They should be made aware of the health risks and be told they must not disturb it. In addition to informing them of the location of the known ACMs, they should be aware of the sorts of materials that contain asbestos and the need to inform a responsible person if they inadvertently discover any materials that may contain asbestos.

Some types of work with asbestos must be carried out only by licensed persons and/or be notified to the Health and Safety Executive or Environmental Health Authority. Details of licensed contractors can be obtained from the Health and Safety Executive.

Do not attempt any work with ACMs unless you have obtained specialist advice first and are taking proper precautions.

Disposal of Asbestos

Asbestos waste (that is any material containing more than 0.1% asbestos) such as broken pieces of asbestos cement sheet, is covered by the environmental legislation, the Special Waste Regulations 1996. It should be double wrapped in heavy-duty polythene bags and clearly labelled before it is transported to a disposal site. It can only be disposed of at a site that is licensed to take it.

Key Action Steps

- Identify materials that may contain asbestos on site
- Arrange for samples to be taken to identify if (and what type of) asbestos is present using a UKAS accredited laboratory

- Decide whether the ACM should be removed or sealed, taking into consideration its location and condition
- Arrange for the ACM to be removed or sealed using a licensed contractor
- Mark any ACM that is to remain on site with the asbestos label and keep a register
- Inform employees and contractors of its location and make sure they do not disturb it
- Regularly check the condition of the asbestos by inspecting it.

References

The Control of Asbestos Regulations 2006 SI 2006/2739
Approved Codes of Practice "Work with materials containing asbestos" (L43) ISBN 0 7176 62063.
"The management of asbestos in non-domestic premises" (L127) ISBN 0 7176 62098

Managing Asbestos, your new legal duties
www.hse.gov.uk/manageasbestos.pdf

Priced Publications: from HSE Books on 01787 881165 or www.hsebooks.co.uk.
Free Publications: www.hse.gov.uk

HSE Asbestos Home page
www.hse.gov.uk/asbestos/index.htm
HSE Asbestos Essentials
www.hse.gov.uk/asbestos/essentials/index.htm

Hardfacts:

1024: Asbestos in Buildings – A guide for Residential Property Owners
6039: Asbestos in Buildings – A guide for Dutyholders
6028: Asbestos Management: Control of Asbestos Regulations

Available from HSE Books on 01787 881165 or The Stationery Office.

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Norwich Union Risk Services operates a Risk Helpline during normal business hours for the cost of a local telephone call. The telephone number is:
0845 366 66 66
www.nu-riskservices.co.uk