

ASBESTOS IN THE HOME

Many people have worries about asbestos, but undisturbed it usually poses no problems. However, care should be taken to prevent the release of fibres as they can cause serious damage to your health. Fibre release is normally due to disturbance caused by refurbishment, re-decoration or removal of the asbestos. This risk is taken very seriously by the Council and in Council run properties, such as libraries, schools and residential homes all work to asbestos is carried out by licensed contractors.

This guide addresses concerns and questions about asbestos in the home. It explains what it is, where it is found, why it might be a problem and how to deal with it.

This is not a guide for builders or contractors working with asbestos and should not be used as such.

WHAT IS ASBESTOS?

Asbestos is a naturally occurring, fibrous silicate mineral. Once mined the asbestos rock mineral is crushed producing fibres of different lengths and characteristics. The three types of asbestos which have been used in the UK are: crocidolite (blue asbestos); amosite (brown asbestos) and chrysotile (white asbestos). It is not possible to identify the type of asbestos by the colour as it is often incorporated with other materials. To be certain that a material contains asbestos it should be analysed in a laboratory.

WHY WAS ASBESTOS USED?

The fibres being strong and resistant to heat and chemicals has led to their use in a wide range of building materials and household products, often as fireproofing. White asbestos was most commonly used in domestic appliances and buildings. Brown asbestos was used in thermal insulation up to the late 1960's and in various sprayed applications and insulating boards until the middle and late 1970's respectively. Blue asbestos was used for insulation lagging and sprayed coating. The marketing, supply and new use of blue and brown asbestos was prohibited in 1985 and white asbestos in 1999.

WHEN IS ASBESTOS A PROBLEM?

When asbestos containing materials are damaged or deteriorate with age they can release fibres into the air. The shape and size of the fibres enables them to penetrate deep into the lungs, where they can stay for a long time causing possible damage to lung tissue. Blue and brown asbestos is thought to be the most dangerous forms due to their size and shape.

Asbestos has been widely used and as a result there is a low level of asbestos in the air everywhere. While asbestos is potentially a very hazardous material, the risk to the public from asbestos in the home is low; however levels of fibres may be higher in buildings containing asbestos materials.

The greater risk to health arises when asbestos is damaged or if the material is drilled, sawn, scrubbed or sanded. If you suspect that a material might contain asbestos do not carry out work on it but seek expert advice as DIY work can cause high, short-term exposures to asbestos fibres.

There are three main conditions associated with exposure to asbestos: asbestosis, lung cancer and mesothelioma and these are nearly always industrial diseases. The diseases may take between 10 and 60 years to develop to the point where they can be diagnosed.

BEWARE: You cannot accurately identify asbestos material by simply looking at it. The only way to know for sure whether a product contains asbestos and what type is to have it tested.

WHERE IS ASBESTOS FOUND?

Building materials containing asbestos were widely used from 1930 to around 1980, particularly from the 1960's onwards. So houses and flats built or refurbished at this time may contain asbestos materials. However homes built since the mid 1980's are very unlikely to contain asbestos.

The types of asbestos materials that may be found in homes are:

ASBESTOS CEMENT PRODUCTS

(asbestos content mainly 10-15%, but sometimes up to 40%)

Asbestos cement is the most widely used asbestos material and numerous enquiries are received by the Environmental Health Service each week from residents seeking advice. It is found in many types of building as profiled sheets for roofing and wall-cladding, in flat sheets and partition boards for linings to walls and ceilings, in bath panels, soffit boards, fire surrounds, flue pipes, cold water tanks and as roofing tiles and slates. It has been commonly used as roofing and cladding for garages and sheds and also in guttering and drainpipes. Asbestos cement products are less likely to release high levels of fibres because of the way they are made, unless they are subject to extreme abrasion. Damage from weathering may also release a small amount of fibres.

ASBESTOS INSULATING BOARD

(asbestos content 20-45%)

Insulating boards have been used for fire protection, heat and sound insulation. It is particularly common in 1960s and 1970s system-built housing and is found in materials such as ducts, infill panels, ceiling tiles, wall lining, bath panels and partitions. It is unlikely to be found in buildings constructed after 1982. You should not be attempting to work on insulating board yourself

ASBESTOS LAGGING

(asbestos content 55-100%)

Asbestos lagging has been used for thermal insulation of pipes and boilers. It was widely used in public buildings and system-built flats during the 1960s to early 1970s in areas such as boiler houses and heating plants. Asbestos lagging is very rarely found in homes, especially those constructed after the mid 1970s. The use of asbestos for thermal insulation was banned in 1986. Any material of this nature in your home should be left undisturbed; removal should only be carried out by a licensed contractor.

ASBESTOS SPRAYED COATING

(asbestos content up to 85%)

Sprayed asbestos coatings were used for fire protection of structural steel and are commonly found in system-built flats during the 1960s. The coatings were mainly applied around the core of the building such as service ducts, lift shafts, etc. Use stopped in 1974 and the spraying of asbestos has been prohibited since 1986. Sprayed asbestos has since been removed from many buildings, or sealed to prevent fibres being released.

You are unlikely to come across material of this nature unless undertaking structural work. Any asbestos spray coating should be left undisturbed and removal must only be by licensed contractor.

HEATING APPLIANCES AND DOMESTIC EQUIPMENT

Asbestos was used in some warm air heating systems, electric storage heaters (up to 1976) and in flameless catalytic gas heaters (up to 1988) and some early 'coal effect' gas fires. It has also been used in domestic equipment, such as oven gloves and ironing boards, seals on cooker doors and fire blankets. Asbestos has also been used in brake linings and pads. There is advice later in this document regarding the disposal of small items of asbestos.

OTHER BUILDINGS MATERIALS AND PRODUCTS

Asbestos has been used in a variety of other building materials, for example, in decorative coatings such as textured paints and plasters. These are still widely in place but supply and application has been prohibited since 1988. Plastic floor tiles, cushion flooring, roofing felts, tapes, ropes, felts and blankets can also contain asbestos. Loft or cavity wall insulation does not contain asbestos.

- INDOOR ASBESTOS CEMENT

Indoors, asbestos cement should be sealed by painting with an alkali-resistant paint such as PVA emulsion, or primed with an alkali-resistant primer and then covered with normal undercoat and gloss paint. Asbestos cement or board should not be sanded before painting.

- TEXTURED COATINGS

If you have textured coating containing asbestos, it is best to leave it alone and cover it with a coat of emulsion. Whilst there is no legal obligation to use licensed contractors to remove Artex finishes stripping it off is difficult and potentially dangerous so it is strongly advised that this work is only to be done by licensed contractors. However, small quantities can be soaked so that they become a soggy mass before being gently scraped off.

- STORAGE HEATERS

Some electric storage heaters, generally those manufactured before 1975, contain asbestos. Please contact this Department to check whether your heater has been identified as containing asbestos. Do not dismantle the storage heater to check whether this is the case. Generally the heaters are perfectly safe as long as they are not damaged or tampered with. If you wish to have the heaters removed this must be done by licensed contractors.

- CATALYTIC HEATERS

Some catalytic heaters, burning butane and propane without a visible flame, may contain an asbestos panel if manufactured before 1983. Contact the manufacturer of the appliance or your gas supplier for advice.

- **BRAKE LININGS**

Car brake and clutch linings and disc brake pads in older cars contain asbestos. It is now illegal in the UK to install asbestos brake linings in vehicles. Replacing brake linings can release a high level of fibres. If you decide to carry out the work yourself you are recommended to wear a disposable dust mask 'CE' marked to EN149 with FFP2 particulate filters (see Contact List) and to carry out some face seal leakage testing to ensure you have the mask fitted correctly. Use a damp cloth to wipe dust out of the drum. Do not blow it out. Put the cloth in a sealed and labelled plastic bag for disposal (see 'How should I dispose of Asbestos').

- **COOKERS**

Some older cookers may have asbestos filler ropes around the inside of the oven door. If it appears to be in a poor condition contact the manufacturer for advice.

- **GUTTERS AND CORRUGATED ROOFS**

Keep gutters and drains serving asbestos roofs clear of debris. Silted up gutters can contain a high percentage of asbestos fibres. Do not sweep with wire brushes to remove moss, as you will be sweeping off fibres as well.

REMEMBER:

- It is not always easy to tell whether a product contains asbestos, as modern asbestos-free materials often look similar. Remember it is usually older products that contain asbestos.
- Asbestos materials in good condition that cannot readily be damaged are often best left where they are because removal can lead to higher levels of fibres in the air for some time afterwards. Check the condition of asbestos materials from time to time to make sure they have not become damaged or started to deteriorate. If you are planning home improvements or maintenance and have asbestos in your home, always inform builders, maintenance workers or contractors before they start work.
- Asbestos materials that are badly damaged or deteriorating can release dust and should be removed. Some asbestos materials must always be removed by contractors with a special licence issued by the government. These licensed contractors have to follow regulations to ensure asbestos is safely removed.
- Asbestos materials that are slightly damaged can sometimes be repaired by sealing or enclosing the material – SEEK ADVICE on the most appropriate action.
- Asbestos materials were often used for their fire resistance properties. If you are having the asbestos removed you may need to replace it with another suitable material in order to maintain the fire integrity of your home.

HOW CAN I IDENTIFY PRODUCTS OR MATERIALS CONTAINING ASBESTOS?

Since 1976 British manufactures have put labels on their products to show they contain asbestos, and since 1986 all products containing asbestos carry the European label.

The supplier or manufacturer of a product may be able to tell you if it contains asbestos.

Often homes built at the same time contain similar materials – your neighbours may know if surveys for asbestos have been done.

Lastly, if you are unsure whether a material or product within your home contains asbestos and you need to work on it or remove it you may wish to assume that it does and treat the material accordingly. Alternatively you may wish to seek professional advice and have a sample of the material analysed in a laboratory, see the contact list at the back of this leaflet for further information.

HOW SHOULD I DISPOSE OF ASBESTOS?

Small items of asbestos around the home can be disposed of if you are careful. Items such as ironing board rests and simmering pads may be damped down and placed in a tightly sealed plastic bag.

Do not break up large sheets but keep them whole. They do not need to be sealed in bags but should be doubled wrapped in heavy gauge plastic sheeting (available from most builders merchants) and clearly labelled "ASBESTOS".

Do not put asbestos waste in a dustbin or skip. It is classified as hazardous waste and must continued to be handled with respect until it can be safely disposed of by contractors licensed to carry asbestos.

TAKE CARE WHEN DOING DIY

If you have asbestos materials in your home extra care should be taken when doing DIY. Do not attempt to work on materials containing sprayed asbestos, lagging or insulating board as this must be undertaken by a licensed asbestos removal contractor. DIY work on asbestos cement materials is not illegal but you need to take the following precautions:

- Keep other people away from the area of work
- Avoid causing the production of asbestos fibres by minimising the damage done to the material. If removing sheets of asbestos keep them as whole as possible – do not be tempted to break them up into smaller, more easily manageable pieces
- Do not drill or saw asbestos unless absolutely necessary. Do not scrape or sand asbestos materials before painting and decorating (consider covering over existing decorations rather than attempting to remove them). Some types of asbestos materials are very soft and can release large numbers of fibres if rubbed or scraped
- Keep asbestos materials wet to avoid producing dust
- Work outside if possible and avoid working overhead
- Wear protective clothing, preferably category 3 (type5/6) disposable overalls and a disposable dust mask 'CE' marked to EN149 with FFP3 particulate filters
- Use hand tools rather than power tools
- Do not use a domestic vacuum cleaner to clear up the dust as the very small fibres will pass through the bag and will then be distributed throughout the house. Damp down and remove any dust with a cloth. Do not wash dust from these cloths but dispose of appropriately

- When you have finished work clean up and then take off overalls carefully, to avoid raising any dust which may have collected in the fabric. Disposable overalls and masks should be doubled bagged in strong plastic bags, sealed and clearly marked “ASBESTOS”. Wash non-disposable overalls straight away, separately from other clothing, in a washing machine.

REMEMBER

- Do not drill, saw, scrub asbestos materials with wire brushes, or disturb it in anyway.
- Avoid disturbing or damaging asbestos materials in good condition.
- If you have damaged or deteriorating asbestos materials in your home then SEEK ADVICE.
- If you think that your warm air heating system, electrical storage heating system or flameless catalytic gas heater may contain asbestos SEEK ADVICE from your local gas or electricity supplier. If they do contain asbestos, do not attempt to dismantle these appliances yourself.
- Do not take risks – treat asbestos with respect

HOME IMPROVEMENT/ BUILDING WORK:

If you are using contractors to undertake building or refurbishment work within your home you will need to inform them if you are aware of any asbestos material within the building. You will need to discuss with them if the proposed work will disturb the asbestos in any way and how they plan to avoid/ minimise any disturbance. You will also need to go through what steps would be taken if they found asbestos material during the course of their work.

ASBESTOS REMOVAL AND THE USE OF LICENSED CONTRACTORS:

You may decide to have the asbestos removed from your home. The vast majority of work with or removal of asbestos will require a licensed contractor. The only exceptions to this are:

- 1) If you are employing a contractor to carry out short, non-continuous maintenance activities and specified fibre concentrations and control limits are not exceeded (see www.hse.gov.uk/asbestos/licensing/need.htm)
- 2) If the asbestos material they are removing has the asbestos fibres “linked in a matrix”, such as asbestos cement products used for shed roofs etc.
- 3) If you are employing contractors to encapsulate or seal in asbestos containing material which is in good condition.
- 4) If you are using contractors to carry out testing or survey work to ascertain the nature of a material or the air monitoring either during or following work with asbestos.

The list of licensed contractors is available on the HSE website. You should expect to discuss with the contractor:

- the type of asbestos you wish them to remove,
- ensure that they have given the HSE 14 days notice of any work they are undertaking for you.
- their waste disposal arrangements – they should dispose of all asbestos material
- their arrangements for air monitoring after the work is completed. Air monitoring must be carried out by a company independent of the contractor.

- If your work does not require a licensed contractor you should still ensure that anyone you choose to carry out the work is competent to do so. You should expect a good contractor to want to know what type of asbestos they will be working with, whether you are aware of the licensing regulations and to find out how they intend to do the work to ensure that their method complies with the advice relating to DIY.

The Control of Asbestos Regulations 2006 relate to the duties and obligations of employers and the self-employed when working with and/ or removing asbestos.

There is a great deal of information regarding Control of Asbestos Regulations 2006 available on the Health & Safety Executive website:

If you require further advice please contact:

**Environmental Health and Trading Standards Service
Guildhall
Kingston upon Thames, Surrey. KT1 1EU**

**Tel: 020 8547 5536
e-mail: ehadmin@rbk.kingston.gov.uk**

CONTACT LIST

This alphabetical list is supplied solely to assist individuals to instruct their own consultant/contractor to advise them on any asbestos related issue. The Companies are in no way approved by this Council. They are included because this Department has had recent dealings with them or they are included on membership lists supplied by the Asbestos Removal Contractors Association.

ASBESTOS LABORATORIES (for analysis of materials and general advice):

CPA Laboratories Limited

Tel: 020 8222 6083

e-mail: admincpa@eurofins.co.uk

28-32 Brunel Road
Westway Estate
Acton, London
W3 7XR

Square Root Limited

Tel: 020 8665 4200

e-mail: enquiries@srbc.biz

102-115 Windmill Road
Croydon. CR0 2XQ

ASBESTOS COLLECTION/REMOVAL/DISPOSAL SERVICES

Abstract Asbestos Consultants

Tel / Fax 01932 761 660

Mobile 07919 415940

www.abstractasbestos.co.uk

Little Orchard
Rope Walk
Sunbury-on-Thames
Middlesex
TW16 5HR

[also provide a sampling and site survey service]

Asbestoclear [operate a national service]

Tel: 0845 1301002

e-mail: enquiries@asbestoclear.co.uk

Web: www.asbestoclear.co.uk

The Pitch
Budden Road
Coseley
West Midlands. WV14 8JN

Additional information can be found at:

www.hse.gov.uk/asbestos/index.htm

www.arca.org.uk

ADVICE FOR THE REMOVAL AND DISPOSAL OF ASBESTOS CEMENT SHEETING

From the 1930's to 1980's asbestos cement sheeting was widely used as roofs and walls of sheds and garages. If in good repair and not in a position where the sheets are likely to be damaged there is minimal risk to health and no need for it to be removed on health grounds alone. If however it is in a poor condition, deteriorating, or you simply wish to replace your garage or shed the removal of the sheets can be undertaken by any person providing appropriate guidance is followed. If however you would rather not handle the material yourself or you feel that you are not physically able you may wish to appoint a contractor. The contractor does not need to be licensed by the Health and Safety Executive to handle asbestos but would need to be licensed to carry hazardous waste if they are to take the material away from home.

Each month the Environmental Health Service receives numerous requests for advice and information from residents who wish to remove their garages/sheds made with asbestos cement sheeting. If you follow the advice below you will minimise the release of asbestos fibres and your exposure to them.

Please note this advice relates solely to the removal of asbestos cement sheeting, the removal of other types of asbestos material should only be undertaken by licensed contractors. This advice is also not intended as a manual for builders or contractors working with asbestos and should not be used as such.

- Wear protective clothing, preferably category 3 (type5/6) disposable overalls and a disposable dust mask 'CE' marked to EN149 with FFP2 particulate filters. **The standard dust masks available from DIY stores will not protect you against asbestos fibres**
- Keep other people away from the work area
- On sheds and garages with asbestos cement roofs debris in gutters/traps can contain a high percentage of asbestos fibres. If present remove debris using disposable cloths and place cloths and debris in heavy duty plastic bag, clearly labelled 'ASBESTOS'. Seal with strong tape. **Do not use brushes**
- Without using excessive quantities of water keep the sheets wet whilst handling them
- Do not remove any moss that may be attached to the sheets
- Detach the sheets from the frame of the shed or garage as carefully as possible. The bolts or screws are likely to be rusty and difficult to undo so you may unavoidably need to break the sheets at the attachment points. **Minimise breakages**. Do not use power tools. The sheets are brittle so do not crawl onto the roof
- The sheets will be heavy and difficult to handle and it is likely to be a two person task but do not be tempted to break them up into more easily manageable pieces. If they do break they are likely to leave sharp, jagged edges
- Wrap each sheet up in heavy duty plastic sheeting (available from builders merchants). Seal with strong tape and clearly label 'ASBESTOS'. Place small pieces of sheeting in heavy duty plastic bags, seal and label. Place sheets in safe place ready for disposal
- Clean up the area removing all pieces of sheeting. Do not sweep the material up but keep damp and scrape with an appropriate tool. Use damp cloths to further clean the area and place all debris, cloths, dust masks and overalls in heavy duty plastic bag, clearly marked 'ASBESTOS'. Seal and place with sheets ready for disposal.

DISPOSAL OF ASBESTOS CEMENT SHEETING:

Borough residents may contact Environmental Services Waste Management Services on 020 8547 5560 who will make arrangements with the Hazardous Waste Collection Service at the Corporation of London for their waste to be collected. Please note that up to 11.5m² or 5 half filled builder's rubble bags of asbestos cement may be collected from your home free of charge. Sheets must be wrapped in heavy duty (1000 gauge) plastic sheeting and sealed in heavy duty tape making it air tight. This service does not take trade waste.

PLEASE NOTE THAT THE ASBESTOS WASTE DISPOSAL FACILITY AT THE COUNCIL'S WASTE DISPOSAL SITE IN VILLIERS ROAD IS NO LONGER AVAILABLE