

fact sheet



Asbestos

What is asbestos?

Asbestos is a natural mineral fibre. There are three main types: chrysotile (white asbestos), crocidolite (blue asbestos) and amosite (brown asbestos). All three types are hazardous.

What is asbestos used for?

Asbestos fibres are strong and resistant to heat and chemicals. This has led to use of asbestos in a wide range of buildings materials and products, often for fireproofing. Properties built since the mid 1980's are unlikely to contain asbestos anywhere in the building. Asbestos cement (asbestos encapsulated in cement for strength) has been widely used as a roofing material for garages and sheds and in cladding.

Why can asbestos be a problem?

When asbestos becomes damaged fibres can be released into the air. These can be breathed into the lungs where they can stay and cause damage. If these fibres are breathed in, they can increase the risks of lung diseases.

People who have worked with asbestos, or have washed clothing of those who have worked with asbestos are most likely to be affected. Workplace regulations now protect such people.

Is everyone exposed to asbestos?

There is a low level of asbestos fibres in the air everywhere because asbestos has been widely used. Exposure to these low levels is unlikely to harm health.

Where is asbestos found?

Building Materials containing asbestos were widely used from 1930 to around 1980. So houses and flats built or refurbished in this time might contain asbestos. It's not always easy to tell whether a product contains asbestos particularly as modern, asbestos-free material often look similar.

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

- Insulating board (contains around 20-45% asbestos) - Has been used for fire protection, heat and sound insulation. It is particularly common in 1960's/1970's housing and is found in ducting, panelling, ceiling tiles, bath panels;

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- Lagging (contains around 55-100%) - Widely used in public buildings and system built flats during the 1960's to early 1970's in areas such as boiler rooms/heating plants. It is very rarely found in homes. It is unlikely to be found in homes built after 1982;
 - Sprayed coating (contains up to 85% asbestos) - Used for fire protection of structural steel and commonly found in 1960's construction. Mainly applied to service ducts/lifts shafts etc;
 - Asbestos cement products (contains around 10 to 15% asbestos, but can be up to 40%) -Asbestos cement is the most commonly used asbestos material. It is found in many types of building as profiled sheets for roofing and all cladding, in flat sheets and partition boards for lining walls and ceilings, in bath panels, soffit boards, flues, cold water tanks as roofing tiles and slates. It has been commonly used as roofing and cladding for garages and sheds and gutters and drainpipes. Its use has declined since 1976 but it is still used in roofing and cladding products.

Asbestos has been used in a variety of other building materials for example decorative coatings such as textured paints and plasters. These are still widely in place but supply and application is now prohibited.

Is asbestos cement less hazardous?

Asbestos cement products are considered relatively low risk and are unlikely to release high level of fibres unless they are damaged by extreme abrasion or drilling.

Is there anywhere else that asbestos can be found in the home?

Asbestos was used in some warm air heating systems, electric storage heaters and similar applications. It has been used in domestic situations such as fire blankets, and seals on cooker doors. Asbestos has also been used in some heat resisting products such as ironing boards and oven gloves. It has also been used in brake lining and pads.

How can products or materials containing asbestos be identified?

It is not possible to be certain whether a material contains asbestos by sight alone. Asbestos containing products can look very similar to those not containing asbestos. There are two steps that can be taken to help identify asbestos:

- Since 1976 British manufacturers have put labels on their products to show they contain asbestos. Since 1986 all products with asbestos carry a European label;
- Often homes built at the same time contain similar materials. Your neighbours may know if a survey for asbestos has been done.

Does roof or cavity wall insulation contain asbestos?

Loft or cavity wall insulation does not contain asbestos.

What should I do if I suspect there is asbestos in my home?

Asbestos materials in good condition that cannot be readily damaged are often best left where they are as removal can lead to more fibres in the air. Owners of dwellings who are

planning improvements should always inform their contractors of the suspected or actual presence of asbestos materials. Asbestos materials that are slightly damaged can sometimes be repaired by sealing/painting.

If the caller is a private their home and they are concerned about the condition of asbestos containing materials in their home, they should first be advised to discuss this with their landlord. If this action is unsuccessful, an enquiry can be taken for the PH team if the property is occupier by a single family, or for the HMO team if in bedsits or the house is shared.

Who can remove asbestos?

Asbestos materials that are badly damaged can release dust and should be removed. Some materials high in asbestos content (such as sprayed asbestos, lagging or insulating boards) must be removed by contractors with special licences. Further information on licensing can be obtained from the Health and Safety Executive website

Sometimes it is dangerous to have asbestos removed - for example fire protection materials - without replacing them with a suitable alternative. If protecting material is removed, then a suitable risk assessment should be performed to ensure that the risk from fire in the home is satisfactorily reduced.

Can any DIY work be done with asbestos?

Only very limited DIY work can be done with asbestos containing materials. People with asbestos materials in the home need to take extra care when doing DIY.

DIY work must not be carried out on sprayed asbestos, lagging or insulating boards - this must be done by a licensed asbestos removal contractor. If you are in any doubt, you should seek appropriate advice.

The following precautions should be taken when working with other asbestos materials:

- Other people to kept away from the work area;
- Wear protective overalls (disposal overalls that can be thrown away afterwards are preferable);
- Wear a disposal dust mask 'CE' marked to EN 149 standard with FFP2 filters;
- Keep the asbestos material wet to reduce the amount of dust produced;
- Work outside if possible. Avoid working on surfaces above head height, as particles may drop and be inhaled;
- Do not drill, cut or disturb asbestos. Do not scrape or sand asbestos materials before painting and decorating. (Think about covering over existing decorations rather than trying to remove them). Some types of asbestos materials are very soft and can release a lot of fibres if you rub or scrape them;
- Use hand tools rather than power tools;
- Do not use a domestic vacuum cleaner to clear up the dust. Hire an industrial vacuum cleaner that meets standard BS 5415 (Type H);
- When work is finished, the area should be carefully clean up and then overalls removed carefully. (This will avoid raising any dust which may have collected in the

fabric). Disposal overalls should be placed in two polythene bags and taken to the amenity site as asbestos waste away;

- If you cannot throw your overalls away, wash them in a washing machine, separately from other clothes, straight away.

Where can residents dispose of asbestos materials?

There is a special area of the Council's Civic amenity site for the disposal of asbestos cement. Please note that you must contact the council before taking asbestos to the civic amenity site. Small amounts of waste should be wetted and placed in a strong plastic bag for disposal. Large asbestos cement sheets should not be broken up. They should be wrapped in polythene and disposed of as asbestos waste. **Asbestos materials should never be put in the ordinary domestic waste.**

What is the legal position for asbestos in the home?

The property owner is responsible for the safe disposal of asbestos in the home. Any contractors employed by you should comply with all relevant legislation relating to asbestos which is enforced by the Health and Safety Executive.