

Asbestos

Advice on Asbestos

Asbestos

Asbestos is a natural mineral, which has been widely used in construction materials and in articles within the home for a number of years. Because of its heat-resistant properties it was particularly useful as a means of providing fire protection, both in sheet form and as a sprayed coating and when combined with cement, it made a useful weather resistant material which was easily moulded into sheets, pipes, gutters, etc. Problems with asbestos largely arise when it is damaged, when it is being cut or drilled and when it is necessary to dispose of the material.

Is asbestos dangerous?

The short answer to this is - "It depends". There are three main types of asbestos - so called white, brown and blue asbestos. Asbestos is present in materials in the form of fibres or hairs and the fibres of each type of asbestos have slightly different characteristics. The use of blue and brown asbestos, the installation of asbestos insulation and the spraying of asbestos have all been banned since 1986 and the use of white asbestos has been heavily curtailed since that time. However, there is still a large amount of all three types of asbestos present in both the home and work environment.

In the case of sheet materials, such as are used for garages, sheds, etc., the asbestos comprises only about 15% of the total material, the remainder being made up of cement. Other forms of asbestos, such as insulating board, sprayed coatings and boiler and pipe lagging may have between 85% and 100% asbestos content.

The risk associated with asbestos is that of breathing in the fibres but, again, not all fibres pose a risk. Long fibres are likely to become trapped in the hairs of the nose or in the mucus linings of the nose and lungs and will be expelled when coughing or blowing the nose; similarly very small fibres are likely to be expelled from the lungs during normal breathing. Fibres of a particular size or of a particular type of asbestos, however, may become embedded in the lungs and can, over a period of time, lead to the formation of mesothelioma and the development of lung cancer.

The development of these conditions, however, tends to be over an extremely long time period - sometimes 20-30 years - and in most cases the problem arose as a direct result of poor protection for persons working with the material rather than as a result of casual or short-term exposure to it. Having said that it is still important that asbestos in all its forms is treated with respect, that all protective measures are taken and the material is treated as potentially hazardous.

I have some asbestos material in my home or workplace - should it be removed?

The answer again is “It depends” subject to the following questions:-

Is the material damaged, cracked or broken?
Is the surface being worn or rubbed against?
Is any insulation on pipes perished or flaking?

If the answer to any of the above questions is “**YES**” then some action is likely to be necessary. This might not involve complete removal of the material but further investigation is necessary. See contacts list at the end of this guidance. You should be aware, however, that removal of asbestos is an expensive operation. This is because of the precautions which must be taken to safeguard both the health of persons working with the material and of those who may be exposed to it during its removal. **On no account, however, should you be tempted to remove asbestos yourself without being fully aware of the health and safety requirements for the removal and disposal.**

If asbestos material is in good condition it may safely be left in place. You can paint sheets or boards to prevent any dust escaping - use emulsion paint for insulating boards and an alkali-resistant primer for asbestos cement sheet. Any cut edges are best painted by using a dabbing action to seal the surface of the material.

In both cases DO NOT RUB DOWN THE MATERIAL PRIOR TO PAINTING.

I have an electric storage heater I want to remove. Someone has told me that it has asbestos in it. How do I dispose of it?

The first stage is to check whether your heater(s) actually do contain asbestos. Check directly with the manufacturer. If you provide them with details of the make and model number (usually printed on the plate on the back of the appliance) they will be able to advise you accordingly. In addition, many electrical contractors will arrange for the removal and disposal of old heaters -where they are replacing them with new ones.

If your appliance **DOES** contain asbestos it **SHOULD NOT** be dismantled and you will need to contact a licensed asbestos contractor to arrange for removal and disposal. See Yellow Pages under Asbestos Removal for contractors who will undertake this work.

If your appliance **does not** contain asbestos it can be safely dismantled and disposed of **after being electrically disconnected by a competent person**. Storage heaters cannot be disposed of at the Civic Amenity sites and should be disposed of by an **Environment Agency registered waste carrier** (Contact the Environment Agency on 08708 506506 for an instant waste carrier validation check).

I have an asbestos cement garage which I want to dispose of. How do I go about it?

As mentioned previously, asbestos cement only contains approximately 15% asbestos so, if handled properly, its removal should not pose a risk to health. You should follow the procedure below:-

1. Disposal

Although it is the last stage it should be the first point to consider. Asbestos material must by law be disposed of in a controlled manner and only on tips authorised for that purpose. At the present time sheets from a shed or garage can be taken to the Disposal Sites listed at the end. However the container provided at these sites can only accept sheets less than 6ft long.

Anyone other than the householder disposing of Asbestos material must comply with the special waste regulations - contact the Waste Regulation Section of the Environment Agency, telephone number 0800 807060.

In order to be handled safely the sheets will need to be double wrapped in heavy gauge plastic sheet (commonly known as "Visqueen" and available from builders merchants) with the joints sealed with adhesive tape. Smaller pieces should be double wrapped in heavy-duty polythene bags.

2. Preparation

Prior to starting work a few simple precautions are necessary to reduce exposure of persons to asbestos fibres:-

- ideally choose a damp, calm day to do the work
- keep other people away from the work area
- wet the material with water containing a little washing up liquid (provided there is no contact with electricity).

3. Dismantling

The word "dismantling" has been chosen rather than "demolition" because the basic objective is to remove the sheets in as large a piece as possible **not to break them into small pieces which could release fibres into the atmosphere.**

In practice this means that the screws, bolts or nails which hold the sheets to the framework will have to be removed or cut - **not an easy task if the structure has been up for some time!** If this is proving difficult it is advisable to keep the sheet on which you are removing wetted with the soapy water to reduce as much as possible the dust and fibres released. The sheets should then be double wrapped in heavy gauge plastic sheeting.

4. Cleaning Up

Any small pieces which remain should be wetted and sealed inside two plastic bags, any dust should be cleaned up using a damp cloth with the dust and cloth also being sealed inside two plastic bags.

My work involves contact with asbestos materials. Am I at risk?

Many jobs involve the likelihood of contact with asbestos - both intentionally and accidentally. Particular areas of concern are those persons who work in the demolition, construction and building services trades, especially when working on buildings over 15 years old where it is possible for you to breath in asbestos fibres without realising it.

Workers in these areas may be at risk because:-

- they will often be unaware of the presence of asbestos
- they may suddenly encounter it or damage it whilst working and/or
- they may be unaware of the risks associated with exposure to asbestos and of the precautions to be taken, particularly when they have worked with the material over a number of years - familiarity really does breed contempt!

If you are working in a building for the first time always ask if the building has been checked for asbestos. If the building has been identified as containing asbestos get advice from those in charge before you start work. In addition, the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations, 1992 require that an assessment is carried out of the risks to health or safety posed by work activities. This means, in practice, that **employers** should take such steps as:-

- assessing the risks which the work poses and deciding what precautions need to be taken to protect both workers and others who may be affected by the work
- giving employees sufficient information, instruction and training so that they are aware of the risks and what precautions they should take
- calling in specialist contractors to remove the asbestos or
- providing employees with **suitable** protective equipment and clothing.

If you uncover any material which you suspect may be asbestos STOP WORK AND REPORT IT TO YOUR MANAGER

Always be especially careful when working with old insulation board, ceiling tiles or cement sheeting which **may** contain asbestos. If you have to drill, cut, sand or handle this material always assume that it **does** contain asbestos and follow the safe working procedures which aim to prevent or reduce dust, for example:-

- keep asbestos materials (including waste) damp whilst you work on them
- don't use power tools on asbestos materials as they create and spread dust; use hand tools instead
- use the personal protective equipment which has been provided which may include a suitable mask or respirator, disposable overalls, etc.
- if you are wearing a respirator or mask make sure you have been properly trained how to fit it and that it is clean. If the respirator has a separate filter ensure that it is changed at the frequency recommended by the manufacturer and that any defects are reported to your employer.
- don't allow waste to accumulate - clean it up as you go using either a dustless "Type H" vacuum cleaner with a high efficiency filter or damp cloths **not brooms or brushes** and don't allow asbestos waste to be walked on or allow vehicles to crush it
 - put the waste, disused filters and cleaning cloths in a heavy duty plastic bag and place this inside a second bag and label it to show that it contains asbestos waste
 - after handling asbestos material always wash your hands and face thoroughly before eating, drinking or smoking and at the end of the day's work
 - don't take any non-disposable overalls which you have worn for asbestos work home for washing. Your employer should send them to a specialist laundry.

Don't forget to be alert at all times to the dangers of asbestos. Avoid all possible exposure to the dust. Work in such a way that your own health and that of other persons are not put at risk because of your actions. Encourage others to work in the same way.

Can I get a grant for the removal of asbestos?

No. The amount of asbestos material currently in use would make this financially impossible for central or local government to fund.

These notes are only intended as a simplified guide to Health and Safety matters and do not cover all aspects in detail.

CONTACTS LIST

Asbestos in private houses

Environmental Services, Environmental Protection Team - 01454 868001

Asbestos in the work place

Construction/maintenance industries and factories/manufacturing
Health & Safety Executive - 0117 9886000

Offices, shops and warehousing

Environmental Services, Public Protection Team – 01454 868001

Council Houses

Initially contact your local area housing office. Main telephone number 01454 868005.

South Gloucestershire owned/operated premises:

Health & Safety Section
Corporate Services
01454 863096

Disposal Sites (for use by householders only)

Civic Amenity Sites

There are specialist skips at Mangotsfield, Thornbury and Yate SORT IT!* centres for the disposal of bonded sheet asbestos i.e. guttering and corrugated roofing sheets (Maximum quantities apply so please use the telephone number below to check first). Please declare to the attendant on your arrival that you are disposing of bonded asbestos. This service is currently not available at Station Road, Little Stoke. We would advise that you call the site prior to your visit to confirm they have room in the Asbestos skip; **01454 868000**

Free Internet access is available at all South Gloucestershire libraries

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