

## **A Guide to Asbestos in the Home**

### **Introduction**

Asbestos has been widely used as a building material even in domestic properties for many years. Its use was not finally banned in the United Kingdom until 1999, which means that up until this time, it could easily have been used in the construction, repair and renovation of properties. If your property was built before this, the likelihood is that it will have some asbestos containing materials somewhere within it.

The fact that there may be asbestos containing materials in a property does not automatically mean there is a problem. In fact, asbestos containing materials are very good at what they do. Asbestos fibres only present a problem to human health if they become damaged, either accidentally or whilst being worked on during building works or DIY. If this happens there is the possibility they could release fibres, which if breathed in may have the potential to harm health.

This leaflet will hopefully answer the concerns and questions you may have about asbestos in homes. It explains:

- what asbestos is,
- where it may be found,
- why it might be a problem and
- how to deal with it.

### **What is Asbestos?**

Asbestos is a naturally occurring material and is mined in a similar way to coal. It has been used in buildings for about 150 years, but early uses date back to Roman times.

It is contained within rock, which is crushed and processed to allow the asbestos to be 'harvested'. Most of the asbestos that has been used in this country has been imported, as asbestos does not occur naturally in large quantities in the United Kingdom.



**Raw Asbestos**

## Why asbestos may be a problem?

When asbestos materials age or become damaged they can release fibres into the air. These can be breathed deep into the lung where they may stay for a long time, causing possible damage. When very high numbers of these fibres are breathed in there is a risk of lung diseases, including cancer. A single exposure is most unlikely to lead to a fatal disease.

People who have worked with asbestos for many years as part of their job or have washed the dusty clothing of those who worked with asbestos are most likely to be affected. Workplace regulations now protect such people.

## Is everyone exposed to asbestos?

Asbestos fibres are present in the air everywhere. This is because asbestos has been used widely for many applications. Exposure to this low level of fibres is unlikely to harm people's health.

Levels of fibres may be higher in buildings containing damaged asbestos materials. It is unlikely that the levels of asbestos materials in your home will be harmful, but if you have damaged asbestos materials in your home you should seek advice from the Trust on appropriate action to take. See section on further help and advice.

Higher, short-term exposures to asbestos fibres can occur during DIY work where asbestos containing materials are disturbed. For this reason it is important that you try not to create dust when working with asbestos containing materials. Sanding and drilling should, where at all possible, be avoided all together.

## Where is asbestos likely to be found?

Building materials containing asbestos were widely used from about 1930, but particularly from the 1960s onwards up until 1999, so any domestic property built or refurbished during this time may contain asbestos materials.

Asbestos has also been used in some heat-resistant household products, such as oven gloves and ironing boards. The use of asbestos in these products decreased greatly around the mid-1980s, and since 1993 the use of asbestos in most non-building products has been banned.

- It is not always easy to tell whether a product contains asbestos, as modern asbestos-free materials often look similar. However it is usually older products that contain asbestos.
- Loft or cavity wall insulation does not contain asbestos



**An asbestos cement board on the end of an old ironing board**

The following sections give information on the type of different materials that may contain asbestos.

## Asbestos Cement Products - Asbestos content 11 - 15%



Asbestos cement is the most widely used asbestos material. It is found in many types of building and can be profiled sheets (like the photo on the left showing some profile roofing sheets) or in flat sheets and partition boards for linings to walls and ceilings.

Flat sheets were also commonly used for bath panels, soffit boards, fire surrounds, and linings to meter cupboards and bin stores. Flat materials were also used for roof coverings including some tiles and slates.



**Flat asbestos cement sheeting**

Asbestos was also mixed with cement to make other moulded shapes and because it is impervious to water was used in many water and drainage products. Examples include flue pipes, cold water tanks, soil stacks, guttering and down-pipes.



Asbestos cement products are unlikely to release high levels of fibres because the fibres are well contained and 'fixed' in the cement product. Therefore, unless they are subject to extreme abrasion they are generally safe and without risks to health.

## Other highly bonded materials – Asbestos content 1-10%

Asbestos bound within these materials have a much lower risk than broken or friable materials because the fibres cannot easily be released. Other common building products which may contain asbestos include:-

- Vinyl floor tiles (1-5%)
- Lino (5-10%)
- Textured finishes e.g. Artex (1-3%)



## Asbestos Insulating Board (AIB) - Asbestos content 25-40%

Asbestos Insulating Board has been used for fire protection, heat and sound insulation.

It's use was particularly common in the 1960s and 1970s system-built housing and is found in materials such as ducts, infill panels, ceiling tiles, wall lining (particularly in bin or meter cupboards), bath panels and partitions.



## Pipe and Boiler Lagging - Asbestos Content 60 - 100%



Asbestos lagging has been used for thermal insulation of pipes and boilers. It was widely used in public buildings.

Asbestos lagging is very rarely found in homes, and in Trust properties will generally be limited to the non tenant access areas of high rise blocks of flats and 'communal' boiler rooms.

## 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 built during the 1960s. The coatings were mainly applied around the core of the building, such as service ducts, lift shafts, etc.

Sprayed asbestos has since been removed from many buildings, or sealed to prevent fibres being released.

## Heating appliances and domestic equipment

Asbestos was used in some warm air heating systems, electric storage heaters (up to 1976), in flameless catalytic gas heaters (up to 1988), and in 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.

## How can I identify products or materials containing asbestos ?

Asbestos containing materials **cannot** be identified simply by looking at them. In order for anyone to give a categorical answer as to whether a material contains asbestos they **must** have a sample taken and have it analysed by an accredited laboratory. In addition, the risk presented by the asbestos differs depending on the type of asbestos it is; the only way to identify the type of asbestos is to have it analysed.

Since 1999 the use of asbestos in any new or used product for domestic properties has been prohibited. Therefore any product which you or the Trust provides or installs from now on **will not** contain asbestos – even if the old product which was removed did.

**This includes a prohibition on the reuse or recycling of materials containing asbestos.**

- Since 1976 British manufacturers have put labels on their products to show they contain asbestos, and since 1986 all products containing asbestos must be appropriately labelled.
- The supplier or manufacturer of a product should be able to tell you if it contains asbestos.
- Often homes built at the same time contain similar materials; your neighbour may know if surveys for asbestos have been done.



**REMEMBER, asbestos containing products can look very similar to those not containing asbestos; if in doubt SEEK ADVICE.**

## Some common questions and answers...

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

**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.

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 find out if there are asbestos containing materials in your home and if your proposed work will disturb them.

Always inform builders, maintenance workers or anyone else before they start work.

**Asbestos materials that are slightly damaged** can sometimes be repaired by sealing or enclosing the material- **SEEK ADVICE** on the most appropriate action. (See the section on further help and advice at the end)

**Asbestos materials that are very badly damaged** or deteriorating can release dust and fibres and should be removed.

## Can I remove the asbestos myself?

Some asbestos materials must **always** be removed by contractors with a special license issued by the Health and Safety Executive. These licensed contractors have to follow safe system of work and specific requirements to ensure asbestos is safely removed and asbestos fibres are not released during the removal. For further advice please contact the Trust.

### **REMEMBER...**

**Sometimes it is dangerous to have asbestos materials removed. For instance, removal of asbestos which has been installed to provide fire protection can have serious consequences if it is not replaced with suitable material which also has fire resisting properties.**

- Avoid disturbing or damaging asbestos materials in good condition.
- If you have damaged or deteriorating asbestos materials in your home then SEEK ADVICE.
- Do not keep using oven gloves or other small items containing asbestos - dispose of them safely (SEE SECTION ON DISPOSAL OF ASBESTOS)
- If you think that your warm air heating system, electrical storage heating system or flameless catalytic gas heater may contain asbestos then SEEK ADVICE from your local gas or electricity supplier. If they do contain asbestos, do not attempt to dismantle these appliances yourself, but SEEK ADVICE
- Avoid creating asbestos dust
- Avoid breathing asbestos dust.
- Asbestos material in good condition should be left alone.
- If you think you may have asbestos containing products in your home, SEEK ADVICE before you take any action.

## Take care when doing DIY

If you have asbestos materials in your home, extra care should be taken when doing DIY. **DO NOT** attempt work involving sprayed asbestos, lagging or insulating boards, as this must be undertaken by a licensed asbestos removal contractor. If in doubt, SEEK ADVICE.

Do not undertake any works on asbestos containing materials in your property without first consulting the Trust. It could be that special precautions need to be taken, and you may be asked to complete a Landlord's Permission Request. The Trust maintains an asbestos database detailing the known location of asbestos in its properties. If you carry out works without consulting the Trust first you could be putting yourself at risk and will be invalidating the information the Trust holds on your property.

The following are good precautions which should be taken when dealing with asbestos containing materials.

- 1) Keep other people away from the area of work.
- 2) Wear protective clothing (e.g. overalls), preferably disposable, and avoid breathing in asbestos dust (a disposable dust mask 'CE' marked to EN 149 with FFP3 particulate filters is recommended).
- 3) Keep asbestos materials wet to avoid producing dust.

- 4) Work outside if possible and avoid working overhead.
- 5) Do not drill, cut or disturb 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.
- 6) Use hand tools rather than power tools.
- 7) Do not use a domestic vacuum cleaner to clear up the dust. Hire an industrial vacuum cleaner that conforms to BS 5415 (Type H).
- 8) When you have finished work, clean up and then take off the overalls carefully, to avoid raising any dust which may have collected in the fabric. In case of disposable overalls, double-bag them, clearly mark (**ASBESTOS**) and dispose of as asbestos waste. Wash non-disposable overalls straight away, separately from other clothing, in washing machine.

### How should I dispose of asbestos ?

- Wet small amounts of asbestos waste and put it in a strong plastic bag- seal this tightly and clearly mark it ASBESTOS.
- Do not break up large asbestos-cement sheets - they do not need to be sealed in bags but should be wrapped in polythene or similar sheeting and disposed of as asbestos waste.
- Do not put any asbestos waste in the dustbin - SEEK ADVICE from The Wrekin Housing Trust's Building Services Team about how to dispose of your asbestos waste responsibly - 01952 217100.



### SEEKING ADVICE

The Wrekin Housing Trust has an active management plan to ensure the appropriate identification and subsequent management of asbestos containing materials in all its own properties. This plan is co-ordinated by the Trust's Building Services Team, working in partnership with specialist asbestos surveying and removal consultants.

However, the team is also happy to offer further guidance and training to private householders any companies looking for further information on asbestos materials.

If you do have a query or concern about asbestos in your property - STOP WORK AND SEEK ADVICE

Call The Wrekin Housing Trust on 01952 217100 and ask for the Building Services Team.

### What is the Trust Doing about Asbestos in its Properties ?

The Trust is committed to complying with all applicable legislative controls relating to the control of asbestos, and will not compromise the health and safety of any person through any uncontrolled exposure to asbestos containing materials. This will be done by achievement of the following objectives:

- The identification of the location, condition, nature and extent of all asbestos containing materials in premises for which the Trust is responsible.

- That following the identification, a suitable and sufficient documented assessment of the risk of asbestos fibre release from the material is undertaken.
- That in recognition of the identified and documented risk, suitable measures be documented and implemented to adequately control present and future exposure to asbestos from the identified material.
- That the information obtained and recorded is reviewed and monitored on a regular basis.
- That once completed this information is passed onto every person who may reasonably be expected to work with or come into contact with the identified materials.

### **Identification of Asbestos Containing Materials**

The Wrekin Housing Trust is committed to carrying out a comprehensive non-destructive survey of all its properties in order to identify the location, the form, and the condition of asbestos containing materials, enabling an assessment of risk to be compiled.

Survey work will be managed to take place within three main areas of property management :

1. Those undertaken in relet properties which will have the quickest response and turnaround time, usually 48 hours,
2. Those carried out on properties forming part of the planned programme where surveys will be undertaken prior to contracts being let,
3. All other properties not falling within either of the groups above which will be carried out on an equitable area by area basis.

The types of survey carried out will generally be Asbestos Management (sampling) surveys (formerly known as Type 2). Refurbishment & Demolition (destructive) surveys will only be undertaken in situations where major improvement or demolition works are to be undertaken. Surveys will be undertaken by UKAS registered consultants or in house employees who have attained the British Institute of Occupational Hygiene P402 qualification.

### **Risk Assessment**

Once a survey and subsequent analysis has identified asbestos containing materials a risk assessment of the health risk that the material(s) presents to tenants, employees and others will be undertaken. The assessment will take into account: -

- The type of the material, its properties and the type of asbestos contained within.
- The integrity of the material and the condition of any sealant or enclosure.
- The location and damage potential of the material.
- The existing, and likely future tenure of the property

## **Control Measures**

Where the presence of asbestos containing materials or suspected asbestos containing materials are found the following control measures will be followed:-

- If the material is in sound condition presenting no risks to health and located in a position where it cannot easily be damaged then it can be left untreated and labelled. Details will be recorded for inclusion on database (details to be recorded on the Asbestos Log Form and forwarded to the Building Services Team) and periodically re-inspected to ensure its condition does not deteriorate.
- If the material is slightly damaged but otherwise in a sound condition, or located in such a position that it may present a future risk to health if left untreated, it may be repaired, sealed by an approved method and labelled. Details will be recorded for inclusion on database (details to be recorded on the Asbestos Log Form and forwarded to the Building Services Team) and periodically re-inspected to ensure its condition does not deteriorate further.
- If the material is in such a condition and location that it presents a risk to health, or may be disturbed by maintenance work it should be removed and disposed of by a registered removal contractor to a registered disposal site or transfer station.

## **Recording of Information**

The Trust has developed and maintains an asbestos property database which will have the information obtained from all survey/reinspection/removal work and notification forms entered onto it. This information will then be made available to all contractors and Trust employees carrying out any work at a Trust property in order that the appropriate risk reduction techniques can be followed.

## **Provision of Information to Others**

Once the Trust is in receipt of any information relating to asbestos in its properties this must be made available to tenants, employees and others whose health and safety has the potential to be affected by it.

The asbestos database will be used to produce a standard report to be given to tenants and others which will include information relating to:

- What the Trust is doing to manage asbestos in its properties,
- The location of all asbestos present in the property,
- The type of asbestos and concentration in which it is present,
- What must or must not be done/carried out on the materials, including provision of general information on asbestos in building materials in the home,
- Contact name and telephone number for further information and advice relating to the material

For newly let properties this information will be included as part of the 'new tenant information pack' and will be discussed with the new tenants as part of their induction to the property.

For existing tenants the information will be sent out with an accompanying letter describing the reason for the provision of the information.

### **Landlord's Permissions**

When tenants wish to make certain changes to their homes they need to apply for and be granted 'landlord's permission' in accordance with the terms of their tenancy agreement. As part of this procedure where the Trust holds asbestos information we will ensure tenants are provided with the information. Where the proposed works will disturb asbestos containing materials the Trust will require these materials to be dealt with by specialist contractors registered with the Asbestos Removals Contractors Association (ARCA). The cost of the specialist works must be met by the tenant.

### **Discovery of Asbestos other than through planned surveys**

If during any work activity an employee or non-employee suspects that a material contains asbestos or suspected asbestos, they should stop work immediately and report their findings to The Wrekin Housing Trust Building Services Team (01952 217100). The Trust will ensure that appropriate action which may include the survey and analysis of the suspect material(s). If asbestos is confirmed a decision will be made as to the appropriate remedial action to be taken in accordance with Trust Policy.

It is the Trust's Policy to use only ARCA registered removal contractors and UKAS approved consultants to deal with asbestos related works within the organisation. In order to ensure the health and safety of all persons who may be affected by work with asbestos containing materials all contractors will be required to provide up to date copies of training records of all operatives involved in such work.