

Managing asbestos in buildings:

A brief guide



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Who is this guidance for?

This guidance is for, anyone who is responsible for maintenance and repairs in a building, which may contain asbestos. The 'duty to manage' asbestos is included in the Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012. You are a 'dutyholder' if:

- you own the building;
- you are responsible through a contract or tenancy agreement;
- you have control of the building but no formal contract or agreement; or
- in a multi-occupancy building, you are the owner and have taken responsibility for maintenance and repairs for the whole building.

What buildings are affected?

- All non-domestic buildings, whatever the type of business.
- The common areas of domestic buildings, eg halls, stairwells, lift shafts, roof spaces.
- All other domestic properties are not affected by the duty to manage.

If you are not the dutyholder but have information about the building, you must co-operate with the dutyholder, eg leaseholders must allow managing agents access for inspection.

Why manage asbestos?

Breathing in air containing asbestos fibres can lead to asbestos-related diseases, mainly cancers of the lungs and chest lining. Asbestos is only a risk to health if asbestos fibres are released into the air and breathed in. Past exposure to asbestos currently kills around 4500 people a year in Great Britain. Workers who carry out building maintenance and repair are particularly at risk.

There is usually a long delay between first exposure to asbestos and the onset of disease. This can vary from 15 to 60 years. Only by preventing or minimising these exposures now can asbestos-related disease eventually be reduced.

It is now illegal to use asbestos in the construction or refurbishment of any premises, but many thousands of tonnes of it were used in the past and much of it is still in place. There are three main types of asbestos that can still be found in premises, commonly called 'blue asbestos' (crocidolite), 'brown asbestos' (amosite) and 'white asbestos' (chrysotile). All of them are dangerous carcinogens, but blue and brown asbestos are more hazardous than white. Despite their names, you cannot identify them just by their colour.

Any buildings built or refurbished before the year 2000 may contain asbestos. As long as the asbestos-containing material (ACM) is in good condition, and is not being or going to be disturbed or damaged, there is negligible risk. But if it is disturbed or damaged, it can become a danger to health, because people may breathe in any asbestos fibres released into the air.

Who is at risk?

The more asbestos fibres breathed in, the greater the risk to health. Therefore, workers who may be exposed to asbestos when carrying out maintenance and repair jobs are at particular risk. Such workers include:

- construction and demolition contractors, roofers, electricians, painters and decorators, joiners, plumbers, gas fitters, plasterers, shop fitters, heating and ventilation engineers, and surveyors;
- anyone dealing with electronics, eg phone and IT engineers, and alarm installers;
- general maintenance engineers and others who work on the fabric of a building.

If asbestos is present and can be readily disturbed, is in poor condition and not managed properly, others who may be occupying the premises could be put at risk.

Where is asbestos found in buildings?

Asbestos was used in many parts of buildings, below is a sample of uses and locations where asbestos can be found:

Asbestos product	What it was used for
Sprayed asbestos (limpet)	Fire protection in ducts and to structural steel work, fire breaks in ceiling voids etc
Lagging	Thermal insulation of pipes and boilers
Asbestos insulating boards (AIB)	Fire protection, thermal insulation, wall partitions, ducts, soffits, ceiling and wall panels
Asbestos cement products, flat or corrugated sheets	Roofing and wall cladding, gutters, rainwater pipes, water tanks
Certain textured coatings	Decorative plasters, paints
Bitumen or vinyl materials	Roofing felt, floor and ceiling tiles

Some ACMs are more vulnerable to damage and more likely to give off fibres than others. In general, materials that contain a high percentage of asbestos are more easily damaged. The table above is roughly in order of ease of fibre release (with the highest potential fibre release first). Sprayed coatings, lagging and insulating board are more likely to contain blue or brown asbestos. Asbestos insulation and lagging can contain up to 85% asbestos and are most likely to give off fibres. Work with AIB can result in equally high fibre release if power tools are used. On the other hand, asbestos cement contains only 10–15% asbestos. The asbestos is tightly bound into the cement and the material will only give off fibres if it is badly damaged or broken, or is worked on (eg drilled, cut etc).

High risk materials



Asbestos pipe lagging



Asbestos insulating board (AIB)



Perforated AIB ceiling tiles



Door with AIB panel

Normally lower risk materials



Asbestos cement wall cladding



Asbestos-containing floor tiles

Remember, although these are the most likely uses and places where asbestos will be found, asbestos was used in many other materials. If you are in doubt, it is safer to presume that a material contains asbestos, unless there is strong evidence that it does not.

What does the duty to manage asbestos involve?

The duty to manage asbestos is included in the Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012. The duty requires you to manage the risk from asbestos by:

- finding out if there is asbestos in the premises (or assessing if ACMs are liable to be present and making a presumption that materials contain asbestos, unless you have strong evidence that they do not), its location and what condition it is in;
- making and keeping an up-to-date record of the location and condition of the ACMs or presumed ACMs in your premises;
- assessing the risk from the material;
- preparing a plan that sets out in detail how you are going to manage the risk from this material;
- taking the steps needed to put your plan into action;
- reviewing and monitoring your plan and the arrangements made to put it in place; and
- setting up a system for providing information on the location and condition of the material to anyone who is liable to work on or disturb it.

Anyone who has information on the whereabouts of asbestos in your premises is required to make this available to you as the dutyholder, but you will need to assess its reliability. Those who are not dutyholders, but control access to the premises, have to co-operate with you in managing the asbestos.

How can you comply with the duty?

This section tells you what you need to do to comply with the duty. There is a checklist setting out the whole process of managing the risk from asbestos **further on in this leaflet**. You can use this to check that you are taking the right steps. If you prefer, the HSE website hosts a web-based tool to take you through the steps (www.hse.gov.uk/asbestos/managing/index.htm).

Although you may appoint a competent person to carry out all or part of the work to meet the requirements of the duty, you will have to be involved in the final assessment of the potential risk. In particular, you will know how the premises are used and what disturbance is likely to occur. The section 'Step 2 - Assess the condition of any ACMs' provides advice on doing this.

Remember, the responsibility for complying with the duty to manage the potential risk remains yours if you are responsible for maintaining relevant parts of a building.

Step 1 Find out if asbestos is present

- ■ Was the building built or refurbished before 2000?
 - ■ If Yes, assume asbestos is present.
 - ■ If No, asbestos is unlikely to be present – no action required.
- ■ Do you already have information on asbestos in your building?
- ■ Walk around your building to identify all ACMs or presumed ACMs, including areas not normally visited like roof voids, store rooms etc.

ACMs may be present if the building was constructed or refurbished before 2000. All asbestos use was prohibited by 1999. You need to do all that you reasonably can to find them by:

- ■ looking at building plans and any other relevant information, such as builders' invoices, which may tell you if and where asbestos was used in the construction or refurbishment of the premises;
- ■ carrying out a thorough inspection of the premises both inside and out to identify materials that are, or may be asbestos; and
- ■ consulting others, such as the architects, employees or safety representatives, who may be able to provide you with more information and who have a duty of co-operation to make this available.

If the building's age or the information you obtain provide strong evidence that no ACMs are present, then you do not need to do anything other than to record why this evidence indicates there is no asbestos present.

You should always presume any material contains asbestos unless there is strong evidence to suggest it does not. Some material obviously does not contain asbestos such as glass, solid wooden doors, floorboards, bricks and stone.

Next: Move to Step 2

Step 2 Assess the condition of any ACMs

- ■ Assess the amount and condition of any ACMs, or presumed ACMs in the building to tell you how likely they are to release asbestos fibres into the air.

The type of ACM, the amount of it and its condition will determine its potential to release asbestos fibres into the air, if disturbed. This will help you decide what you need to do next. The condition of ACMs can be considered by addressing a series of questions:

- ■ Is the surface of the material damaged, frayed or scratched?
- ■ Are the surface sealants peeling or breaking off?
- ■ Is the material becoming detached from its base? (This is a particular problem with pipe and boiler lagging and sprayed coatings.)
- ■ Are protective coverings, designed to protect the material, missing or damaged?
- ■ Is there asbestos dust or debris from damage near the material?

If the ACMs in your premises are in poor condition, you will have to arrange repairs or have them sealed, enclosed or removed.

Next:

- ■ If you have decided to presume material is asbestos and have no maintenance or repair work planned, nor any suspected ACMs in poor condition, you can move straight to Step 4.
- ■ If you do have ACMs in poor condition, or are planning to do work, or want to be sure whether asbestos is present, move to Step 3.

Remember, if you are presuming its asbestos but then want to do work at a later stage, you will either have to go to Step 3 or make sure the work is carried out with full asbestos safety precautions.

Step 3 Survey and sample for asbestos

- Have a suitably trained person conduct a survey to identify ACMs.
- Have the materials analysed to prove if asbestos is present, and what type it is.

You may choose to employ a suitably trained person to do a survey of the premises to identify ACMs, particularly if you are planning maintenance or refurbishment of the premises or installing wiring or pipework/ ducting. The survey should identify what types of ACMs are present, where they are and what condition they are in. You should ask the person or organisation:

- if they are accredited or certificated for asbestos survey work;
- for evidence of their training and experience in such work;
- and ■ for evidence that they have suitable liability insurance.

HSE provides further information on asbestos surveys in its guidance document HSG264 *Asbestos: The survey guide*.

If you suspect materials contain asbestos, you may need to have samples analysed. Often, this is the only certain way of identifying if a material does contain asbestos. Samples should only be taken by suitably trained people.

Do not break or damage any material which may contain asbestos to try to identify it.

Organisations that sample and analyse asbestos need to be accredited by the United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS). UKAS also run an accreditation scheme for organisations that do asbestos surveys. An accredited company is likely to employ suitably trained people for these types of work, but you should check what the firm is accredited for, as some will only be qualified to do surveys and take samples and others only to analyse samples (the UKAS website address is: www.ukas.com).

Surveys may also be undertaken by other competent surveyors who have the appropriate combination of qualifications and experience. Firms are generally listed in Yellow Pages and other business directories. Organisations that carry out asbestos analysis and identification are listed under 'laboratories' or 'asbestos analysts'. Alternatively, you can contact UKAS, see www.ukas.com/tools/contact-ukas.asp.

Next: Move to Step 4

Step 4 Keep a written record or register

- Write down the ACMs you have found, where they are and their condition.
- Record the roles and responsibilities for managing asbestos in your organisation.

You need to prepare a record that shows where the asbestos or presumed asbestos is, the type if known, its form, and what condition it is in. This record needs to be simple, clear and always available at the premises so that you, or any other person that needs to know where the ACMs are, can easily find them. It could be a plan or diagram, a written list or a computer-based record – storing it electronically can make it easier to update.

There may be some areas of the premises which you cannot look at, such as in roofs and heating ducts and behind wall partitions. You should note these on your drawing and presume ACMs may be present, unless you have strong evidence for thinking this is highly unlikely. If you have employed an external organisation to conduct a survey for you, they should provide you with a written record or with the information so you can create your own.

Next: Move to Step 5

Step 5 Act on your findings

- Your plan should include passing on your asbestos register to any worker/contractor carrying out maintenance work on your property.
- Assess the potential risk from the ACMs – how likely are they to be disturbed?
- Draw up a priority plan for action.

You must assess whether the ACMs are being, or are likely to be disturbed. Consider the following factors:

- the information gathered on the location, amount and condition of the ACM;
- if the ACM is in a position where it is likely to be disturbed;
- how much ACM is present;
- whether there is easy access to the ACM;
- whether people work near the ACM in a way that is liable to disturb it; ■ if it is close to areas in which people normally work when it is disturbed; ■ the numbers of people who use the area where the ACM is; and
- if maintenance work, refurbishment or other work on the premises is likely to be carried out where the ACM is.

You will need to prepare and implement a plan to manage these risks:

- Give high priority to damaged material and materials likely to be disturbed; these will need to be repaired, sealed, enclosed or removed using trained personnel – if unsure, seek specialist advice from an asbestos surveyor, a laboratory or a licensed contractor.
- If the material is in good condition and is unlikely to be worked on or disturbed, it is usually safer to leave it in place and manage it.

Repair and removal

Some damaged asbestos can be made safe by repairing it and either sealing or enclosing it to prevent further damage. If this can be done safely, mark the area after it has been repaired and make sure it is on your record of asbestos locations.

If asbestos is likely to be disturbed during routine maintenance work or daily use of the building, it will release fibres. If it cannot be easily repaired and protected, you should have it removed. This work must be carried out by someone trained and competent to carry out the task.

Remember, most work on asbestos insulation, asbestos insulating board and lagging, including sealing and removal, should normally be done by a contractor licensed by HSE.

Managing asbestos left in place

If you decide to leave in place ACMs or presumed ACMs that are in good condition, make sure it is on your record and keep this information up to date.

You must make sure that everyone who needs to know about the asbestos is told about its presence, eg maintenance workers, contractors. You can label ACMs clearly with the asbestos warning sign or use some other warning system (for example colour coding).

If you decide not to label the asbestos, you need to make sure that those who might work on the material know that it contains or may contain asbestos, before they start work, eg when you ask for a quote for a job. You can then agree the precautions necessary to prevent exposure.

It can save time and prevent confusion if you make a note of the location of non-asbestos material, which could be mistaken for asbestos.

Remember, anyone who may work on asbestos must be trained and use safe working methods. Most work with asbestos needs to be done by a licensed contractor.



Asbestos warning label

Next: Move to Step 6

Step 6 Keep your records up to date

- Regularly reinspect any ACMs in your premises and update your records;
- Monitor and review the effectiveness of your action plan.

Even after your action plan is completed, you need to continue to manage the risks from asbestos left in place in your building. Walk around your building to review your record and update it as necessary. Look at the ACMs left in place, including those you have sealed or enclosed, to see if they have deteriorated or been damaged or disturbed in any way. The time between inspections will depend on the type of material, where it is and its condition, but it should be at least every six to 12 months.

You will need to check that the arrangements to control the risk set out in your plan, have been put in place and are working effectively. You must also review the plan if there are significant changes that will affect these arrangements, for example if you do different sorts of work on the premises, or if any of the ACMs are removed.

Checklist

- Find** You must check if materials containing asbestos are present or are liable to be present
- Condition** You must check what condition the material is in
- Presume** You must assume the material contains asbestos unless you have strong evidence that it does not
- Identify** If you are planning to have maintenance or refurbishment of the building carried out or the material is in poor condition, you may wish to arrange for the material to be sampled and identified by a specialist
- Record** Record the location and condition of the material on a plan or drawing
- Assess** You must decide if the condition or the location means the material is likely to be disturbed
- Plan** Prepare and implement a plan to manage these risks

Minor damage	Good condition
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The material should be repaired and/or encapsulated ■ The condition of the material should be monitored at regular intervals. Where practical, the material should be labelled ■ Inform the contractor and any other worker likely to work on or disturb the material 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The condition of the material should be monitored at regular intervals ■ Where practical, the material should be labelled ■ Inform the contractor and any other worker likely to work on or disturb the material
Poor condition	Asbestos disturbed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Asbestos in poor condition should be removed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Asbestos likely to be disturbed should be removed

