



Asbestos

in the home

Facts about
Asbestos –
where it may be found
and what to do if
you find it.



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Asbestos in the Home

Introduction

This leaflet 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.

Asbestos fibres are strong and resistant to heat and chemicals. This has led to their use in a wide range of building materials and products, often as fireproofing. Properties built since the mid-1980s are very unlikely to contain asbestos in the fabric of the building. Properties built after 1990 are extremely unlikely to contain asbestos anywhere in the building. Asbestos cement has been widely used as a cladding material and can still be found in garages and sheds.

Why may asbestos 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 levels of these fibres are breathed in there is a risk of lung diseases, including cancer.

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?

There is a very low level of fibres in the air everywhere because asbestos has been used widely. Exposure to this low level of fibres is unlikely to harm people's health. Levels of fibres may be higher in buildings containing asbestos materials, especially where the materials are damaged. It is very unlikely that the levels of asbestos fibres found in buildings will be harmful, but if you have damaged asbestos materials in your home you should take appropriate action.

High, short-term exposure to asbestos fibres can occur during DIY work. For this reason, try not to raise dust when working with materials which might contain asbestos, and avoid sanding or drilling.

Where is asbestos found?

Building materials containing asbestos were widely used from 1930 to around 1980, particularly from the 1960s onwards. So, houses and flats built or refurbished at 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 products has been progressively banned.

- 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.
- Loft or cavity wall insulation does not contain asbestos.

The types of asbestos materials that may be found in homes are described below.

Insulating board

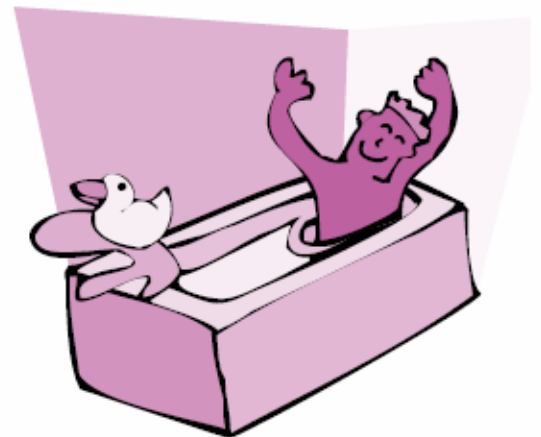
(asbestos content 20-45%)

Insulating board has 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.

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 systembuilt 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.



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. 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.

Asbestos-cement products

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

Asbestos-cement is the most widely used asbestos material. 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 drain pipes. Use

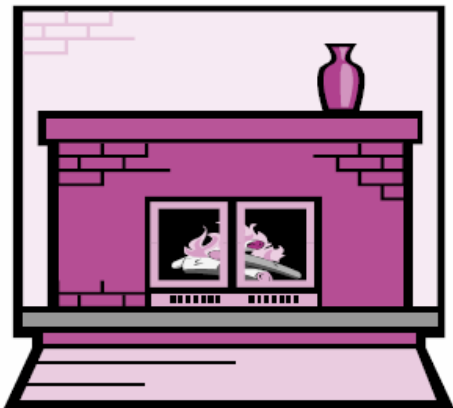
has declined since 1976, but asbestos-cement products are still to be found, particularly in roofing and cladding products. Asbestos-cement products are unlikely to release high levels of fibres because of the way they are made, unless they are subject to extreme abrasion. Damage from weathering may also release a small amount of fibres.

Other building 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.



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.

If you think that your warm air heating system, electrical storage heating system or flameless catalytic gas heater may contain asbestos your local gas or electricity supplier may be able to offer advice.

How can I identify products or 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 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 asbestos is present in houses in your street.
- If you live in rented property your landlord should know if there is any asbestos in your house.
- The Yellow Pages contain a list of consultants who will identify the presence of asbestos in suspect material for a commercial fee.

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 and have asbestos in your home, always inform builders, maintenance workers or contractors before they start work.

Asbestos materials that are slightly damaged can sometimes be repaired by sealing or enclosing the material – SEEK ADVICE from **TEC Services – Environmental Health, Glenurquhart Road, INVERNESS - Telephone 01463 702662; Fax 01463 702606** on the most appropriate action.

Asbestos materials that are badly damaged or deteriorating can release dust and should be removed. Some asbestos materials (sprayed asbestos, lagging or insulating boards) must always be removed by contractors with a special licence issued by the Health and Safety Executive. These licensed contractors have to follow regulations to ensure asbestos is safely removed. You can find a list of licensed contractors in the Yellow Pages.

Sometimes it is dangerous to have asbestos materials removed for instance fire protection materials – without replacing them with a suitable alternative.

How can I dispose of Asbestos Waste?

• Asbestos Removal Contractors

These contractors tend to be more expensive than other options but they have the knowledge, expertise and equipment to safely remove and dispose of waste asbestos. Check that they are licensed by the Health & Safety Executive and remember that licensed contractors must be used to remove sprayed asbestos, lagging or insulating board containing asbestos.

• General Builders

Many builders are capable of doing asbestos cement removal jobs which do not require licensed contractors. They must, however, adhere to safe working methods and make provision for proper disposal of asbestos waste. You must provide them with any relevant information on the type of asbestos waste present.

Commercial operators must be registered carriers and must fill in a consignment note before transporting asbestos waste for disposal. They should contact SEPA at their local offices for more detailed advice.

• DIY

Householders are able to perform a range of DIY projects to remove asbestos cement from their home. You must plan the job and make sure that you take care to protect yourself and others during the process of removal and that proper arrangements are made for disposal of the waste asbestos. Please follow the procedure detailed in the

leaflet “Domestic Asbestos Waste - How to Dispose of Domestic Asbestos Waste” available from the local contacts detailed at the end of this leaflet.

Although householders are not required to fill in a consignment note to carry asbestos waste to a licensed facility, they must follow the eight steps detailed in the aforementioned “Domestic Asbestos Waste – How to Dispose of Domestic Asbestos Waste” leaflet.

If a householder employs commercial operators they must satisfy themselves that these are legitimate contractors who will comply with all waste management requirements.

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 from **TEC Services – Environmental Health, Glenurquhart Road, INVERNESS - Telephone 01463 702662; Fax 01463 702606** on the most appropriate action.

If you do any DIY with asbestos cement materials take the following precautions.

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 FFP3 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 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 BS5415 (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 the 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 a washing machine.
9. Wet small amounts of asbestos waste and put it in a strong plastic bag – seal this tightly and clearly mark it ASBESTOS.

10. **Do not** break up large asbestos-cement sheets – they must be double wrapped in polythene or similar sheeting and disposed of as asbestos waste.
11. **DO NOT** put asbestos waste in the dustbin – SEEK ADVICE from your local Community Works Officer about how to dispose of your asbestos waste and follow the procedure detailed in the “Domestic Asbestos Waste – How to Dispose of Domestic Asbestos Waste” leaflet (see contact details below).

REMEMBER

- 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 house, SEEK ADVICE from Environmental Health Policy Unit, Glenurquhart Road, INVERNESS - Telephone 01463 702662; Fax 01463 702606 **before** you take any action.

Useful Contacts

[General Asbestos Health and Safety Advice – Highland Council, TEC Services - Environmental Health](#) - Telephone 01463 702662; Fax 01463 702606

[Disposal Advice - Highland Council TEC Services](#)

Contact your local Community Works Officer (C.W.O.) – Refuse & Waste:

- **Caithness** - Tel: 01955 641284
- **Sutherland** - Tel: 01408 623421
- **Ross & Cromarty** - Tel: 01349 868429
- **Skye & Lochalsh** - Tel: 01478 612727
- **Lochaber** -Tel: 01397 709016
- **Inverness** - Tel: 01463 245780
- **Nairn** – Tel: 01667 458542
- **Badenoch & Strathspey** - Tel: 01479 810332

[Highland Council Waste Management Team](#) - 01349 868439

Scottish Environment Protection Agency:--

- Thurso Office – 01847 601378
- Dingwall Office – 01349 862021
- Fort William Office – 01397 704426
- Elgin Office – 01343 547663

Health & Safety Executive - 0131 247 2000