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Asbestos



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What your site and employer should do for you

1. Make sure that information about the location of asbestos is made available to the workforce and others who may be affected. (This information should be in the site asbestos register.)
2. Arrange for health surveillance where legislation or policy requires it.
3. Develop suitable control measures to prevent exposure to asbestos.
4. Provide you with suitable training, relevant to the level of work being carried out.
5. Provide appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE), where needed.
6. Provide supervision to make sure the control measures are being used properly.

What you should do for your site and employer

1. Follow any system of work that your employer has in place.
2. Never assume that all of the asbestos located in a building has been found.
3. Make sure that you wear any PPE properly.
4. Stop work, keep away and warn others if you think you have discovered anything thought to be asbestos or to contain asbestos.
5. Attend health surveillance, when requested by your employer.

Introduction

Asbestos is a naturally occurring mineral substance found in the earth's crust. It was mined around the world for hundreds of years, but many countries have now stopped mining and banned the use of it (including the UK) because of the health risks.

Asbestos is a harmful substance that continues to kill many people every year. It is the biggest occupational killer in the UK.



Asbestos mining

Microscopic asbestos fibres are invisible and are easily disturbed.

Breathing in any type of asbestos fibre can cause lung disease (such as asbestosis, lung cancer and mesothelioma).

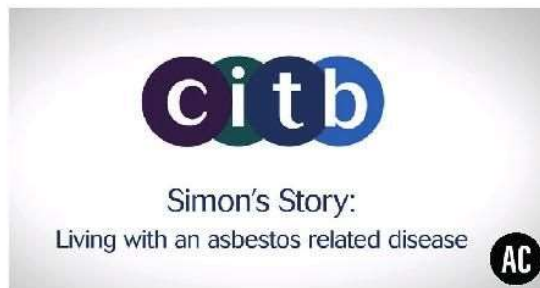
Asbestosis is scarring of the lung that happens after heavy exposure to asbestos. It can cause shortness of breath and in severe cases it can be fatal.

Asbestos-related lung cancer is similar to lung cancer caused by smoking but it is caused by exposure to asbestos fibres.

Mesothelioma is a cancer of the thin, protective membrane (pleura) surrounding the lungs, heart and abdominal cavity, which is only caused by exposure to asbestos. It can take up to 50 years after exposure before symptoms develop. Mesothelioma is fatal in all cases, with death often occurring within months of diagnosis.



Around 5,000 people in the UK die each year as a result of past exposure to asbestos.



Where you will find asbestos

The identification of any substance thought to be or to contain asbestos can only be checked by laboratory analysis.

There are three main types of asbestos.

Blue asbestos (crocidolite). Has good insulation properties and was often used in lagging. It is highly carcinogenic.

Brown asbestos (amosite). Good for insulation, particularly in asbestos insulation board (AIB). It is also highly carcinogenic.

ASBESTOS

White asbestos (chrysotile). The most common form of asbestos. It is commonly found in asbestos cement products. It is also a known carcinogen.



Carcinogens are substances that can lead to cancer (cancer-causing agents).

It has been estimated that asbestos was included in over 5,000 construction products from the 1940s to the 1980s. Asbestos and asbestos containing materials (ACMs) were mainly used in the following.

- Sprayed coatings to ceilings, columns and beams.
- Lagging of boilers, pipework or ducting.
- Pipework and boiler gaskets.
- Suspended ceiling tiles and floor tiles.
- Partitions and ceilings.
- Soffit panels and window boards.
- Asbestos cement roofing sheets, water tanks and pipes.
- Asbestos cement board or sheets used as permanent formwork.



Asbestos pipework



Any building constructed before 2000 must, by law, be considered as potentially containing asbestos, and must be subject to an appropriate survey.

Asbestos is often hidden above suspended ceilings and behind walls. Workers should stay aware and assume that asbestos may still be present, even after a survey has been completed.

If you think that you have discovered or disturbed asbestos, you must make sure of the following.

- Stop work immediately.
- Warn others nearby to keep away.
- Tell your supervisor or employer.

Asbestos surveys

An asbestos survey should be undertaken by a competent person before the work starts. The results of the survey are essential in planning the work. There are two types of asbestos survey.

1. **Management survey.** To assess how to manage and protect asbestos in an occupied building.
2. **Refurbishment or demolition survey.** This must be undertaken before any invasive construction work starts. This survey is much more comprehensive than a management survey.

Asbestos can only be correctly identified by getting a sample analysed in a laboratory.

! In the absence of a laboratory report, it must be assumed that the material contains asbestos.

Working with asbestos

Any worker who is due to work in a building or anywhere on site that is likely to contain asbestos, and whose work may expose them to, or bring them into contact with, asbestos, must complete a suitable asbestos awareness course before starting work.

Workers may come into contact with asbestos when undertaking maintenance, refurbishment or demolition work, such as the following.

- Modifying the structure (partial demolition).
- Stripping out.
- Installing new plumbing, electrics, windows and soffits, loft insulation, kitchens and bathrooms.

Never attempt to work on asbestos unless you are competent and equipped to do so and, if necessary, licensed.

All work with asbestos needs a written assessment of the risks, appropriate levels of precaution (such as the use of personal protective equipment) and appropriate training.



Asbestos warning label

Asbestos removal

Projects can be categorised in the following ways.

- Licensed asbestos work.
- Notifiable non-licensed work.
- Non-licensed work.

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The removal of high-risk asbestos containing materials (such as sprayed asbestos, asbestos lagging and asbestos insulating board) must be carried out by a licensed contractor.

The removal of low-risk asbestos containing materials (such as asbestos cement products and vinyl floor tiles) would not normally need a licence, as long as the correct precautions are taken (such as wearing the correct personal protective equipment (PPE) and respiratory protective equipment (RPE)). Training must be given to all employees undertaking this work.

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Damaged asbestos lagging



Labelled encapsulated asbestos

If you are carrying out work with asbestos you must make sure of the following.

- You understand and follow the written plan of work.
- You use the correct RPE and PPE.
- You follow company procedures for the cleaning, maintenance and storage of your RPE and PPE.
- You maintain your RPE and PPE in a clean and efficient state, good order and repair.
- You use the washing and changing facilities provided.



You must be given awareness training if you are at risk of coming into contact with or disturbing asbestos whilst carrying out your normal everyday work.