

Managing risk from asbestos: a basic guide to dutyholders' legal responsibilities.



What is asbestos?

Asbestos is a naturally occurring mineral. Its natural properties include the ability to withstand high heat and electrical currents. This made it very good for protecting buildings and equipment from heat and fire.



Painted asbestos insulation on pipes

What are 'asbestos containing materials'?

The asbestos mineral was added to other materials such as cement, textiles and insulating board, to form 'asbestos containing materials'. Although use and supply was banned in 1999 a lot of this material still exists in buildings including factories, shops and offices in materials like cement, textiles and insulating board.



Sprayed asbestos insulation on steel framework

Is asbestos dangerous?

Most asbestos containing material in good condition is safe. Asbestos is only dangerous when it's in a loose form, damaged, disturbed or worked on as this can release the asbestos fibres into the air. If these fibres are breathed in over a long time, they may damage the lungs and can lead to very serious diseases, including cancer.

Who's likely to be harmed?

Repair and maintenance workers are most at risk. These people are most likely to disturb or damage asbestos containing materials and they often don't realise that they are working on asbestos. The 'duty to manage' law is designed to protect these workers by requiring those people who are responsible for repair and maintenance work to buildings to make sure they manage asbestos within that building.

What does asbestos containing material look like?

You can't tell if something contains asbestos just by looking at it (or even sniffing or tasting it). The only way to be absolutely sure is to take a small sample and get it tested at a laboratory. However you don't have to do this. You can presume it is asbestos and then take the appropriate precautions when working on the material and use appropriately trained workers, or licensed contractors.



Damaged asbestos insulating board ceiling tiles



Asbestos cement downpipe and roofing sheets

Getting help

For more information visit www.hse.gov.uk/asbestos or call the HSE Infoline on 0845 345 0055

Other useful contacts:

Asbestos Removal Contractors Association: www.arcaweb.org.uk or Tel: 01283 531126
The Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors: www.rics.org or Tel: 020 7334 3844



Health and Safety Executive
www.hse.gov.uk/asbestos
0845 345 0055



Eight steps to asbestos risk management

Complete these eight steps before you carry out any repair, maintenance or refurbishment work to your building.

If you are responsible for maintenance and repair activities for non-domestic buildings, you have a legal duty to manage the risk from asbestos. This leaflet will help small businesses take some basic steps to help meet their legal duty. If you are confident you understand what's involved, follow the eight steps below (you don't have to be a health and safety or asbestos expert). If you have a safety representative you could ask them to help you or you could even get help from a qualified asbestos surveyor.

1 Are you responsible for maintenance and repair activities for non-domestic buildings, either through a contract or tenancy agreement, or because you own the building?

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>You are a dutyholder, and have a responsibility to manage asbestos.</p> <p>Go to step 2.</p> | <p>No <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>The person who is in charge should know where asbestos is. Ask them to show you a record.</p> |
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2 Was the building built before 2000?

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Assume asbestos is present.</p> <p>Go to step 3.</p> | <p>No <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Asbestos unlikely to be present.</p> <p>No action.</p> |
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3 Do you have any information on asbestos in your building already? This may be previous asbestos surveys, building or insurance reports.

Use this information as a starting point.

Go to step 4.

4 Walk round your building.

Identify all materials that may contain asbestos, e.g. insulating board, ceiling tiles and insulation on pipe work. You can presume that asbestos is present, but before any work starts samples should be checked for asbestos. If you don't check, full asbestos safety precautions will still have to be used to do the work.

- If the materials are showing signs of damage, **Go to step 5.**
- If the materials are in good condition, **Go to step 6.**

5 Act on damage.

- Draw up a priority action list considering extent of damage and proximity of workers likely to disturb material.
- Repair or remove material with damage - a licensed contractor may be required - check the HSE website or call Infoline before starting.
- Record what you find and the action you take. **Go to step 6.**

6 Keep a written record.

This needs to be easy to read and easily available. Record where the asbestos containing material is and its condition. Also record roles and responsibilities with regard to managing asbestos. This record could be a plan or diagram of the building, a written list or computer based record.

Go to step 7.

7 Tell people where the asbestos is.

Consider who works on or near asbestos (maintenance workers/contractors) and tell them where the asbestos is before they start work. Anyone working on asbestos should be trained and use safe working methods. Remember, some work requires a licence.

Go to step 8.

8 Keep your records up to date.

Even after your action list is completed you need to continue to manage risks, this includes regularly checking materials to make sure they haven't deteriorated. Action must be taken if deterioration has occurred. Walk around your building at least once a year and update your plan as needed.

