

Asbestos

Asbestos is the name given to a group of naturally occurring minerals made up of microscopic fibres. It has been mined for hundreds of years and was used in many industries throughout the 1950s, 60s and 70s because of its strong insulation and fireproof properties.

There are three main types of asbestos, but they are all dangerous and cause diseases.

White, brown and blue asbestos, with white being used mainly in walls, ceilings and floors of homes and workplaces and used to insulate pipes and in the automotive industry. Brown asbestos mainly used in cement sheets and pipe insulation and commonly found in ceiling tiles and thermal insulation products. This type of asbestos has an extremely high cancer risk. Blue asbestos was commonly used to insulate steam engines, used in pipe insulation, in plastics and certain types of cement.

Workers are at risk of developing asbestos-related diseases including: mesothelioma, lung cancer and other serious diseases such as asbestosis and pleural thickening. They are often fatal.

Asbestos was used extensively in construction, shipbuilding and manufacturing – before the dangers of breathing in such fibres were discovered.

It was popular due to its fireproof qualities, as a non-flammable and virtually indestructible material that meant the fibres could be mixed with cement or woven into fabric and mats.

Asbestos is in more than 80% of all schools and in many of our public buildings including hospitals.

The UK banned asbestos totally in 1999, but many buildings constructed or refurbished before 2000 may still contain asbestos. After exposure, asbestos related diseases can take a long time to develop. Typically, between 10 and 40 years. Anyone exposed to asbestos can be affected. This includes workers and their families if asbestos fibres have been brought home on work clothes and belongings.

Important contact info:

HSE asbestos website:

hse.gov.uk/asbestos/index.htm

Hazards Magazine Asbestos:

<https://www.hazards.org/asbestos/index.htm>

Asbestos Victims Forum

<https://asbestosforum.org.uk/>

Trade Union health and safety web pages



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gmhazards.org.uk



Act Now

On Asbestos

Checklist for taking action on asbestos in the workplace:

- | No: | Task |
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| 1. | Ask your employer whether asbestos is present in any part of the workplace? |
| 2. | If there is asbestos on the premises, ask for a copy of the Asbestos survey and ensure it covers all buildings and a record of where all the asbestos is |
| 3. | Ask your employer for information about who the competent person is who has completed the risk assessment and / or who is responsible for maintaining/checking the asbestos? |
| 4. | Does the Asbestos Survey detail specifically where asbestos is, when it was last checked? |
| 5. | Have all places/items that contain asbestos been clearly labelled? |
| 6. | Is there a procedure to check and inform contractors where any asbestos is located within a building before any work is carried out? |
| 7. | Are all staff given regular asbestos awareness training, appropriate to their role so that they know where it is and how to avoid disturbing it? |
| 8. | Do all staff know where and how to record any concerns with the asbestos? |

No:

9. Does the Asbestos Management Plan (AMP) include who is responsible for managing asbestos in all parts of the workplace and specifically who the duty holder is?
10. Does the AMP include a regular schedule (at least every 6-12 months) for monitoring/maintaining the condition of the asbestos and spot checks and how any risks will be communicated to staff?
11. Are there known procedures to record any exposure and inform any employees who may have been exposed?
12. Are union safety reps fully consulted on all aspects of asbestos management including being made aware of licences / qualifications of contractors to remove asbestos?
13. Is information from the survey recorded on a register that is accessible to staff, visitors and contractors?
14. Do you have a procedure in place if anyone has a reason to believe that material containing asbestos has been damaged that could pose a serious risk of exposure to asbestos fibres to ensure everyone leaves the area:?
15. If there is a planned removal of asbestos, ensure that it clearly states how the work will be done, who will do it and how all risks will be controlled.
16. Ensure there is a periodic review of all procedures and a regular item on the Safety Committee

Keeping a Work History

If a worker has been exposed to asbestos, then check if your trade unions keeps a register. Alternatively log any exposure with the employer and GP in writing. If anyone develops an asbestos related disease, then contact the trade union legal team. There are also Asbestos Victims Support groups who can provide more information and advice www.asbestos.forum.org.uk

Legal and Other Standards for Prevention and control

- **The Control of Asbestos Regulations (CAWR) 2012**
- **Safety Reps and Safety Committee Regulations 1977**
- **Health and safety at work etc Act 1974**
- **Management of Health and Safety At Work Regulations 1999**
- **Construction Design and Management Regulations 2015**
- **Workplace (Health, safety and welfare) Regulations 1992**