

## Working with asbestos

If you intend to undertake a project involving working with any asbestos material, you will need to be very careful not to produce any asbestos dust and to prevent the spread of any asbestos material. The HSE publications listed<sup>1</sup> contain guidance on how to carry out a range of tasks involving asbestos material. If you use a contractor, they must be licensed by HSE<sup>2</sup> if the work involves asbestos insulation, asbestos coating or asbestos insulation board. A list of licensed asbestos contractors is available from the Asbestos Advisory Service (see below).



Non-licensed work may be undertaken by a building contractor, who must take appropriate precautions under the Regulations<sup>3</sup>. Whatever work you are having done, it is advisable to raise the question of the possible presence of asbestos with the contractor. Anyone planning to undertake work on a building should consider the possibility that asbestos may be present before starting work.

## Transporting asbestos

Waste containing asbestos is classified as hazardous waste<sup>4</sup>, and special conditions apply to transport and disposal. Contractors (or anyone carrying out the work for gain) will require a consignment note<sup>5</sup>, which is obtainable from the Environment and Heritage Service. A householder does not require a consignment note to carry asbestos waste to a disposal or a holding site, from his own property.

Asbestos material should be double wrapped in heavy duty plastic sheeting for transport to ensure that there is no possibility of escape of dust or material.

## Disposal of asbestos

Asbestos waste may only be disposed of at a site which has been licensed by the Government to accept it. There are very limited facilities for this in Northern Ireland. Disposal can be arranged through a licensed contractor or by direct contact with the disposal site. The local commercial telephone directory contains contact details.

- <sup>1</sup> A directory of laboratories accredited to analyse materials for asbestos can be found at: <http://www.ukas.org.uk/testing/singlesearch.asp>
- <sup>2</sup> Introduction to asbestos essentials: Comprehensive guidance on working with asbestos in the building maintenance and allied trades: HS6213 HSE Books 2001 ISBN 0 7176 1901 X, price £12.50.  
Asbestos essentials task manual: Task guidance sheets for the building maintenance and allied trades: HS62710 HSE Books 2001 ISBN 0 7176 1887 0, price £8.50.
- <sup>3</sup> Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003.
- <sup>4</sup> Asbestos waste is classified as hazardous waste if it contains 0.1% asbestos or greater. You cannot add other waste to 'dilute' the asbestos content of the waste.
- <sup>5</sup> The Hazardous Waste Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005

The Asbestos Advisory Service aims to provide independent, accurate information and best-practice guidance on matters related to work with asbestos. It is intended to be a single point of reference primarily for the householder seeking guidance on dealing with asbestos in the home.



# advice on dealing with asbestos in the home

## Facts about asbestos

### Introduction

Asbestos is the name given to a group of naturally occurring fibrous minerals with a range of useful properties, including heat resistance and strength. For these reasons it was widely used in a large number of products and applications. These include building products such as asbestos cement (used as a corrugated board to roof buildings) and asbestos insulation board (a softer board used as an internal partition board). As a result, there are many buildings, including homes where asbestos is present. Asbestos use was finally banned in 2000, but its use had declined throughout the '70s and '80s.



### Where you might find asbestos in the home?

**Asbestos cement.** Corrugated asbestos cement has been used extensively as roofing, wall cladding and partitioning. In homes, it will mainly have been used in garages and out-buildings. It has also been used in flat sheet form as infill panels, decorative panels for facings, bath panels, soffits, linings to walls and ceilings, fire surrounds, composite panels for fire protection and weather boarding.

**Insulation board.** Asbestos was used for fire protection, thermal and acoustic insulation, resistance to moisture movement and general building board. It can be found in service ducts, firebreaks, infill panels, partitions and ceilings (including ceiling tiles), roof underlay, wall linings, external canopies and porch linings.

**Flooring.** Thermoplastic floor tiles, PVC vinyl floor tiles and unbacked PVC flooring. Asbestos paper-backed PVC floors.

**Textile, rope etc.** Asbestos rope/yarn has been used as lagging on pipes, jointing and packing materials, e.g. around windows, and as heat/fire-resistant boiler, oven and flue sealing. Textile products include fire blankets and oven gloves. Asbestos string has been used for sealing hot water radiators.

**Insulation.** Asbestos has very occasionally been used as an insulating material in homes for pipes and as loft insulation.

**Other products.** Textured paint, plaster, ironing boards.

### Ban on use of asbestos

The new use of asbestos was progressively banned from 1986 until it was finally banned completely in 2000. Since the mid-1970's there has been a decrease in the use of asbestos materials by choice, although some asbestos may have been re-used. This practice is now banned. It is not possible to use the age of a building as anything other than a rough guide as to whether a building contains asbestos.

### Health risks

Where airborne asbestos dust is breathed in, some of the very fine fibres can get through the body's natural defences against dust and penetrate into the deeper airspaces of the lungs, where they may lead eventually to disease, including asbestosis, lung cancer and a cancer of the lung lining called mesothelioma. The link between asbestos and fatal respiratory disease was recognised early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and by the 1960's was widely known. (Further information is contained in the companion leaflet: 'Background on Asbestos').

### What to do about asbestos in the home

- Asbestos containing material that is in good condition and which is not being disturbed is unlikely to release fibres and should be left undisturbed.
- Material which has ragged edges, for example, the edge of an asbestos cement sheet, can usually be sealed using proprietary paint or other sealant.
- If the material is in poor condition, or if you need to remove it for other reasons, you should consult professional advice.

In many cases, an experienced building professional can advise on whether a material contains asbestos or not. If you need to have a sample analysed to confirm that it contains asbestos, you should contact an accredited laboratory<sup>1</sup> to take the sample for you. If you take the sample yourself, ensure that the material is dampened (use water with washing up liquid) and that you do not create dust or allow the spread of the material. Clean up afterwards using a damp rag and include the laboratory to arrange delivery. There will normally be a charge for this service.

### Buying a property with asbestos material

The presence of an asbestos material in a property that you are considering buying is just one of the things that you will want to think about along with price, location, condition etc. As with other considerations, the more complete information you have, the better position you will be in to make a decision. You will want to know the type of material involved, the extent and condition, as well as the costs of any necessary remedial work. The information you need may be contained in the property condition survey, or you may want to consider employing a specialist asbestos surveyor.

