

ASBESTOS

1 Summary

It is not company policy that any worker shall be directly involved in any work to do with asbestos. Where required specialist companies, duly licensed, will be employed to remove asbestos where an assessment indicates this to be necessary. The company has complied with the Control of Asbestos Regulations (2006) and carried out a survey of asbestos in buildings under its control. However, the presence or otherwise cannot be guaranteed and the purpose of this section is to provide information and procedures to employees if they suspect the presence of asbestos. Where low-levels of asbestos are present following the procedures herein will provide adequate protection for employees. No work shall be carried out on suspected asbestos containing materials without first consulting managers.

2 What is asbestos?

- 2.1 There are three main types of asbestos - chrysotile, amosite and crocidolite: they are usually called white, brown and blue asbestos respectively. However they cannot be identified just by their colour.
- 2.2 Blue and brown asbestos (the two most dangerous forms) have not been imported into the UK for many years and are now banned by law. However, construction and maintenance workers may still come across them:
 - In stripping out old insulation from buildings
 - In the demolition and clearance of former industrial sites and premises including power stations
 - In fire doors and ceiling tiles.
- 2.3 In particular plumbers, carpenters, electricians and cabling engineers may also come across asbestos during routine repair, installation or refurbishment work. Asbestos insulating board is particularly common in buildings constructed before 1980 and was used in fire doors, ceiling tiles, internal walls and panels.

3 What Are The Risk From Asbestos?

- 3.1 Asbestos-related diseases are currently responsible for about 4000 deaths a year in Britain. There is usually a long delay between first exposure to asbestos and the onset of disease. This can vary between 15 to 60 years. The vast majority of those now dying were exposed to asbestos during the 1950s and 1960s, before the current regulations were introduced.

3.2 Work with asbestos can release small fibres into the air. Breathing in these fibres can cause fatal diseases. But provided the asbestos is intact, it does not pose a risk to health.

4 How Does Asbestos Get Into The Body?

4.1 Although the body will get rid of most of the larger fibres that can enter the nose and mouth, tiny fibres can pass into the lower parts of the lung. They can stay there for years and in some cases work their way through the lung lining. The body naturally gets rid of any asbestos fibres that you might take in with food and water, and asbestos fibres cannot be absorbed through your skin.

5 What Does Asbestos Do?

5.1 Breathing in asbestos fibres can eventually lead to a number of diseases. These include:

- Asbestosis or fibrosis (scarring) of the lungs
- Lung cancer
- Mesothelioma, a cancer of the inner lining of the chest wall or abdominal cavity.

THERE IS NO CURE FOR ASBESTOS RELATED DISEASES

5.2 Until recently it was thought that those now dying from asbestos-related diseases were exposed to large amounts of asbestos either regularly or during a single spell of work lasting from a few weeks to a few years. It is now thought possible that repeated low level exposures, during routine repair work, may also lead to asbestos-induced cancers. The scientific evidence on exactly what levels of exposure cause disease is unclear. But we do know the more asbestos dust you inhale the greater the risk to your health.

6. What kind of work creates asbestos dust?

6.1 Some processes or products give off dust more easily than others, but work on any of the following activities is likely to produce some asbestos dust:

- The removal (stripping) of old asbestos insulation materials from buildings or machinery. This is an activity that is likely to produce very high dust levels and should normally be carried out by a contractor licensed by HSE
- The manufacture of products wholly or partly made from raw asbestos, eg asbestos textiles
- The installation, maintenance, repair and general handling of products containing asbestos, e.g. asbestos cement products, insulating board, friction materials such as brake pads and clutch linings

- The removal of roofing felts, old floor tiles, textured paints and plasters containing asbestos
- Routine installation, repair and maintenance work by plumbers, electricians, carpenters etc.

6.2 If you come across something during construction or maintenance work which you think may be asbestos, **stop work and tell your supervisor and/or health and safety representative.** Report the finding immediately to Head Office so that arrangement can be made for sampling and tests to be carried out by people trained to do so **under no circumstances should any employee make any attempt to touch or deal with the suspected material until cleared to do so**

7. Employer's responsibility's to protect health at work

7.1 All work involving asbestos is covered by the Control of Asbestos Regulations 2006. Employers are required by these regulations to protect employees and anyone else who may be affected by their work (e.g. visitors, and people living in the neighbourhood) from exposure to asbestos.

7.2 The employer is required to:

- Assess your likely exposure to asbestos before you start any work
- Take steps to prevent your exposure or reduce it to the lowest level possible
- Make sure that you are fully aware of the risks to your health of breathing in asbestos dust, and that you are properly trained to use the control measures provided, included when necessary a mask/respirator
- Issue you with protective clothing
- Provide adequate washing facilities and, if appropriate, changing facilities and separate storage facilities for protective clothing and for personal clothing
- Monitor your exposure to asbestos when there is doubt about the level of exposure, or to check the effectiveness of control measures
- Provide you with a mask/respirator if you are likely to be exposed to asbestos dust levels higher than those described in the Regulations as the control limits.

The control limits are:	fibres per millilitre of air averaged over	
	4 hours	10 minutes
All types of Asbestos	0.1	0.6

But remember these are not 'safe limits of exposure'.

8. Protecting your own health?

- Make full use of the control measures provided by your employer, and report any faults, e.g. in air extraction equipment
- Use protective clothing and a mask/respirator when required and make sure that they fit properly
- Don't go into a 'respirator zone' without wearing the correct mask/respirator
- Follow any recommended working procedures to reduce dust levels, e.g. use hand tools rather than power tools when cutting asbestos, but if power tools are necessary, use the lowest possible speed; **and keep the material damp whenever possible**
- Keep the work area clean by using the equipment provided by your employer, e.g. a special 'H' type vacuum cleaner
- Make sure that all waste material is put in a polythene bag labelled with the asbestos warning sign
- Co-operate if asked to wear a device to measure your exposure while you work. This is for your benefit because it will show whether you need extra protection, e.g. a different type of mask/respirator
- Don't smoke. Working with asbestos plus cigarette smoking increases the risk of lung cancer. If you can't stop smoking, cut down as much as possible
- Wash your hands and face thoroughly before eating, drinking or smoking
- Don't eat, drink or smoke in the working area
- Don't take home clothing contaminated with asbestos. Wash and change before you go home.

8.1 Employers must by law do everything they reasonably can to protect their workers. The employees also have a duty to co-operate with them to do all you reasonably can to protect yourself and those around you.

9 What About Health Checks?

9.1 If you are exposed to a level of asbestos dust higher than the appropriate **action level** laid out in the Control of Asbestos Regulations, the employer must arrange to have medical examinations, which should include a chest examination, at least every two years. Your employer should keep records of your health checks.