

ASBESTOS
BUILDING SAFER WORKPLACES

BRINGING HEALTH TO LIFE

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workplace health

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INTRODUCTION

HOW TO USE THE TOOLKIT

This toolkit was designed to help managers, employees and leaders learn about how asbestos impacts the health of their workforce. In the document, we look at the different types of asbestos, the law, emergency procedures, risk assessments and the types of work that invovles asbestos.

You can use this toolkit as a guide for developing your strategy for managing asbestos at your organisation, and the toolkit can be distributed among your workforce to help them understand the importance of safely working around this incredibly dangerous substance.

WHO ARE WE?

This toolkit was developed by MOHS Workplace Health, an occupational health provider based in the West Midlands. MOHS offer a range of services designed to make workers healthier and workplaces safer.

mohs workplace health



What is asbestos?

Asbestos is a mineral made up of fine, durable fibres that was once used in industry. It was useful because of its resistance to heat, fire and chemical damage. In the UK, asbestos was used extensively until it was prohibited in 1999. Asbestos can be found in a range of products, including insulation, roofing, ceiling tiles, insulating boards, pipework and textured coatings.

Asbestos becomes a serious health risk when its fibres are released into the air and inhaled. This happens when asbestos containing materials are disturbed. Exposure can lead to serious and potentially life threating diseases, including mesothelioma, lung cancer and asbestosis. These illnesses can take decades to develop, meaning the effects might not be apparent for years.

Although asbestos is no longer used in industry, it remains present in many older buildings. Understanding where asbestos is found, how it can be disturbed and the precautions required for making workplaces safe, is key in protecting against serious illness.



What does the law say?

- **Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012:** This sets out legal requirements for protecting workers from the risks associated with asbestos exposure.
- **Duty to manage:** Those responsible for non-domestic premises must identify asbestos, assess its condition and manage risk.
- **Workplace safety:** Employers must provide suitable risk assessments, information, instruction and training.
- **Licensed asbestos work:** Certain high risk activities require specialist contractors with an appropriate HSE licence.

TYPES OF ASBESTOS

Serpentine asbestos vs. Amphibole asbestos
Asbestos can be divided into two groups: Serpentine and Amphibole. Serpentine has curly fibres, whereas Amphibole is straighter and needle like. There are five different types of Amphibole: Amosite, Crocidolite, Tremolite, Anthophyllite and Actinolite. However, there is only one type of Serpentine Asbestos, Chrysotile.

- **Chrysotile (white asbestos):** Was widely used in construction materials, insulation and asbestos cement. Chrysotile makes up 90% to 95% of all remaining Asbestos worldwide.

- **Amosite (brown asbestos):** Stiff, straight, brittle fibres. Historically used in insulating boards, thermal insulation and other construction products.

- **Crocidolite (blue asbestos):** The most dangerous type of asbestos. Fine, extremely thin, straight fibres that lodge easily in the lungs. Previously used in insulation, cement products and industrial applications.

- **Tremolite:** Occurs as a contaminant in other minerals and materials, including talc and vermiculite. While rarely used in products, talc based baby powder poses a contamination risk.

- **Anthophyllite:** Found naturally in certain mineral deposits, with limited historical commercial use compared with other asbestos varieties.

- **Actinolite:** Occurs naturally in mineral deposits and may be present as a contaminant in asbestos containing materials.



LOCATIONS WHERE YOU CAN FIND ASBESTOS

Insulating board

Asbestos insulating board was used for fire protection, insulation and partitioning. It can be found in ceiling tiles, fire doors, partition walls, boiler enclosures and window panels. AIB can release significant amounts of fibres when disturbed.



Cement

Asbestos cement was commonly used in roofing sheets, wall panels, gutters, downpipes, flues and water tanks. The asbestos fibres are bound within cement, but weathering, breakage and maintenance can release hazardous fibres.



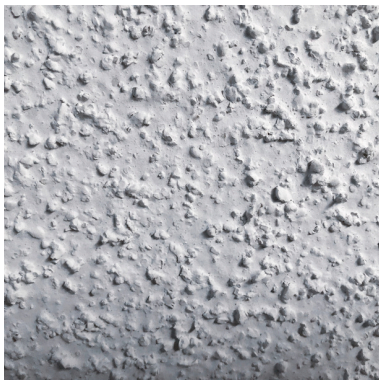
Floor coverings

Asbestos was incorporated into vinyl and thermoplastic floor tiles, sheet flooring and flooring adhesives. These materials may be hidden beneath carpets or other coverings, which is why it's important to check for it before refurbishment or maintenance work.



Textured decorative coatings

Textured coatings, sometimes known by trade names such as Artex, were applied to ceilings and walls for decorative finishes. Although asbestos fibres are generally well bonded, drilling, scraping or removal can release fibres.



LOCATIONS WHERE YOU CAN FIND ASBESTOS

Textiles and gaskets

Asbestos textiles were used in heat resistant ropes, insulation tapes, fire blankets and electrical components. Asbestos containing gaskets and seals were used in pipework, valves, boilers and industrial equipment.



Thermal insulation

Asbestos thermal insulation, commonly known as lagging, was applied to pipes, boilers and heating systems. It can contain high concentrations of asbestos and release fibres easily when damaged or disturbed during maintenance.



Sprayed coatings

Sprayed asbestos coatings were used for fire protection, thermal insulation and acoustic purposes on ceilings, structural beams, columns and the underside of floors. These materials can release substantial quantities of fibres when disturbed and require specialist management.



Loose cavity insulation

Loose asbestos insulation was used within wall and ceiling cavities, beneath floorboards and in loft spaces. Often consisting of loose fibres, it can release large quantities of asbestos into the air when disturbed and requires specialist assessment and control.



WORKING WITH ASBESTOS

TYPES OF WORK

Maintenance or repair
Working on components can disturb asbestos. Be careful when assessing insulation, boards and floor tiles.

Refurbishment or retrofitting
Alterations can expose hidden asbestos behind walls, ceilings and floors. Check surveys before beginning any work.

Demolition
Demolition can extensively disturb asbestos and release fibres. Ensure asbestos has been identified before work begins, particularly within concealed or inaccessible areas.

Installation
Installations can result in drilling or fixing into asbestos containing material. Check before penetrating walls, ceilings, floors or panels.

RISK FACTORS

Inspection

- A survey can identify asbestos containing material, its condition and location before work begins. Survey information should be current and accessible to everyone who may encounter asbestos.

Training

- Those undertaking asbestos work require appropriate training. Asbestos awareness training should help workers recognise materials that may contain asbestos and understand how to safely work with those materials

Precautions

- Follow risk assessments and asbestos management arrangements. Use suitable controls, prevent unauthorised access and never disturb suspected asbestos without the appropriate procedures.

Building research

- Researching a building's age, construction and previous alterations can indicate where asbestos may be present. Review existing records, drawings and surveys before work begins.

LICENSED VS NON-LICENSED

Asbestos work falls into one of two categories, licensed and non-licensed. The category the work falls under depends on the level of risk. This is often determined by factors such as the material, task, likelihood of exposure, duration of work and controls.

Licensed

- Most high risk asbestos work must be undertaken by a contractor holding an appropriate HSE asbestos licence.
- Work is usually licensable when exposure is consistent, high intensity, or the control limit cannot be demonstrated.
- Work involving asbestos coatings is normally licensable and requires specialist controls.
- Assignments disturbing pipe lagging or removing sprayed asbestos coatings is typically licensable.
- When loose fill asbestos insulation is involved, a licensed contractor is required because of the potential for significant fibre release.
- Work on asbestos insulating board may require a licence where the activity exceeds the short duration exemption.
- Licensable work must be notified to the appropriate enforcing authority using an ASB5 notification at least 14 days beforehand.
- Carrying out licensable asbestos work without the required licence is an offence and may result in prosecution.

Non-licensed

- Some low risk asbestos work doesn't require a licensed contractor when specific conditions relating to exposure, materials and duration are met.
- Non-licensed work must be sporadic and low intensity, with exposure controlled below the relevant legal control limit.
- Examples include certain maintenance work involving asbestos cement, such as roof sheets, tiles and rainwater goods.
- Minor work involving asbestos containing ropes, gaskets, floor tiles, roofing materials and other firmly bonded products may be non-licensed.
- Small areas of textured decorative coatings can sometimes be removed using dust reducing methods.
- Encapsulation or sealing of asbestos containing materials in good condition, can be non-licensed when appropriate conditions are met.
- All non-licensed work requires a suitable risk assessment, appropriate controls and adequate information, instruction and training.
- Some non-licensed activities are notifiable non-licensed work (NNLW) and have additional requirements, including notification, medical surveillance and record keeping.

Working in a building containing asbestos

Before starting work, employees should establish whether asbestos is present and if the planned activities could disturb it. Workers can get access to the building's asbestos register and survey information, including the location and condition of known materials. Where information is insufficient, further investigation or an appropriate survey may be required. Work should not begin until the risks have been properly assessed and suitable controls established.

Any work involving asbestos must be properly planned, risk assessed and carried out by workers with the necessary competence and training. Higher risk activities may require a licensed asbestos contractor. If you discover material that may contain asbestos, stop work immediately, prevent others from entering the area and report it to the person responsible. Never assume a material is safe simply because asbestos has not been identified previously.



Requirements

- Check the asbestos register and survey information before starting work.
- Confirm that your planned work will not disturb any known or suspected asbestos.
- Follow the asbestos risk assessment, plan of work and control measures.
- Only undertake asbestos work when you have received appropriate training.
- Use the required personal protective equipment and respiratory protective equipment correctly.
- Never use uncontrolled power tools or sweep asbestos containing dust and debris.
- Stop work immediately if you discover or accidentally disturb suspected asbestos.
- Report damaged or disturbed asbestos immediately and follow your organisation's emergency procedures.

DUTY TO MANAGE ASBESTOS

The duty to manage asbestos requires those responsible for non-domestic premises to find and manage asbestos risks, protecting workers and others from exposure to airborne fibres. It forms part of the Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012.

What is a dutyholder?

A dutyholder is a person or organisation who has a legal duty to manage asbestos within a building, including:

- The owner of a non-domestic building.
- A landlord responsible for a premises.
- Any person or organisation with responsibility for building maintenance or repairs.

What is the duty to manage asbestos?

- **Identify asbestos**: Determine whether asbestos containing materials are present, including their location, quantity and condition.
- **Assess risks**: Consider the likelihood of people being exposed to airborne asbestos fibres from the identified materials.
- **Manage risks**: Create, implement and maintain an asbestos management plan, reviewing it regularly.

CONTROL OF ASBESTOS REGULATIONS

- ✓ **Identify materials:** Determine where asbestos containing materials are located and assess their condition.
- ✓ **Presume asbestos:** Treat materials as containing asbestos, unless there is strong evidence demonstrating otherwise.
- ✓ **Maintain records:** Keep an up to date asbestos register recording locations and conditions of identified or presumed materials.
- ✓ **Assess exposure:** Evaluate the risk of people being exposed to airborne asbestos fibres.
- ✓ **Create management plan:** Develop, implement and monitor an asbestos management plan, reviewing it at least every 12 months.
- ✓ **Monitor condition:** Regularly check identified or suspected asbestos containing materials for deterioration or damage.
- ✓ **Provide information:** Tell anyone who may disturb asbestos, including emergency services, where materials are located and their condition.

EMERGENICES

Unexpected discovery of asbestos

If you discover material that you suspect contains asbestos, stop work immediately. Do not touch, move or disturb the material further. Keep other people away from the area and prevent access until the situation has been assessed.

Inform your employer, supervisor or the person responsible for the building. The asbestos register and relevant survey should be checked to establish whether the material has already been identified. Do not restart work until sufficient information is available and the appropriate controls are in place.

If the material has not been identified or the existing survey does not provide sufficient information, further investigation may be necessary. Work must only resume when it is safe to do so and workers have the appropriate training and instructions.

Accidental release of asbestos

If asbestos is accidentally disturbed, act immediately to prevent further exposure and restrict access while the incident is assessed and controlled.

- **Stop work:** Stop immediately and avoid disturbing the material or contaminated areas.
- **Restrict access:** Keep people away from the affected area to prevent further exposure.
- **Report immediately:** Inform your employer or responsible person and follow your organisation's emergency procedures.
- **Await instructions:** Do not resume work until the area has been assessed and appropriate controls are confirmed.



Emergency procedures

A robust emergency procedure is essential for containing an accidental release of asbestos. Emergency arrangements should explain how to raise the alarm, restrict access, prevent further contamination and arrange appropriate cleanup. Everyone involved should understand their responsibilities before work starts, including processes for contaminated clothing, equipment and waste.

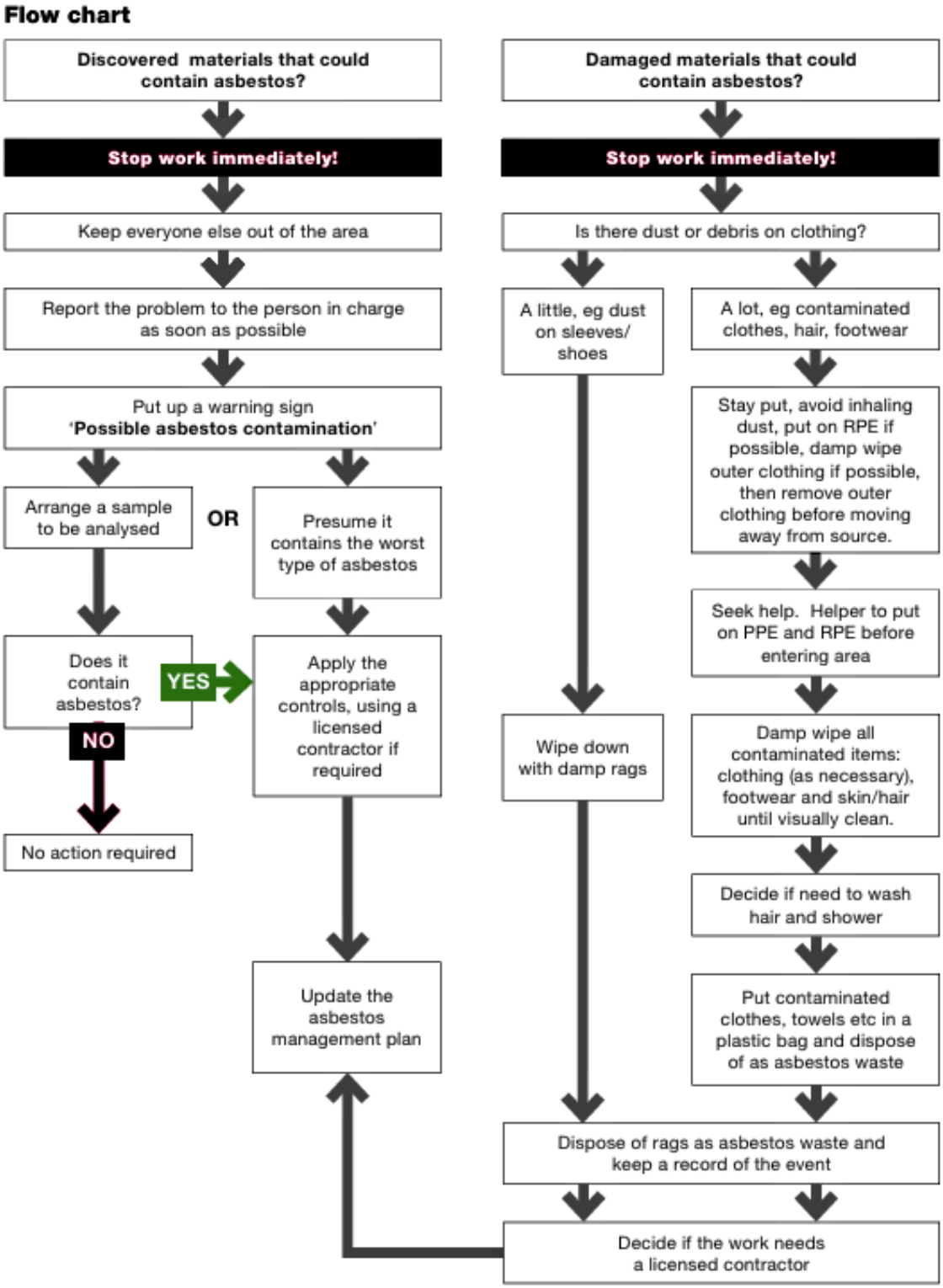


STEPS TO TAKE

- **Halt work:** Avoid disturbing the asbestos containing material.
- **Raise the alarm:** Warn anyone who may be affected by the release.
- **Restrict access:** Prevent unauthorised people from entering the contaminated area.
- **Report the incident:** Inform the person responsible and explain what kind of material was disturbed.
- **Prevent contamination:** Keep contaminated clothing, equipment and materials within the affected area where possible.
- **Arrange cleanup:** Use appropriate procedures and hire a licensed contractor.
- **Record the incident:** Document the release and update the asbestos management arrangements.

HSE ASBESTOS FLOWCHART

The HSE asbestos flowchart provides a step by step guide for what to do when you find asbestos in the workplace. It leads users towards the appropriate controls and determines whether licensed assistance is required. Following the chart helps prevent further disturbance, reduces potential exposure and ensures asbestos incidents are managed consistently as part of an organisation's wider safety arrangements.





RISK MANAGEMENT

EMPLOYER RESPONSIBILITIES

Employers have a legal responsibility to protect their workers from the dangers of asbestos. This means identifying risk, assessing any potential for exposure and implementing suitable controls. Any work that could disturb asbestos must be risk assessed, planned and completed by trained and competent employees. If you are self-employed and your work could involve exposure to asbestos then you are responsible for taking these steps.

Training

Asbestos awareness training gives workers the skills they need to create safer workplaces. In particular, it helps workers:

- **Recognise asbestos:** Identify materials that could contain asbestos to prevent an exposure from happening.
- **Understand risks:** Learn how asbestos exposure can affect health and safety.
- **Work safely:** Understand safeguards before disturbing materials containing asbestos.
- **Prevent exposure:** Reduce accidental disturbance and fibre release.
- **Follow procedures:** Respond correctly to asbestos related incidents.

Risk Assessments

Asbestos risk assessments plays a fundamental role in safely working in an environment that contains or could contain asbestos. The assessment identifies the potential for exposures to asbestos, looks at who might be affected and the measures required to eliminate or reduce risk before work begins. It must be job specific and completed by someone with appropriate competence.

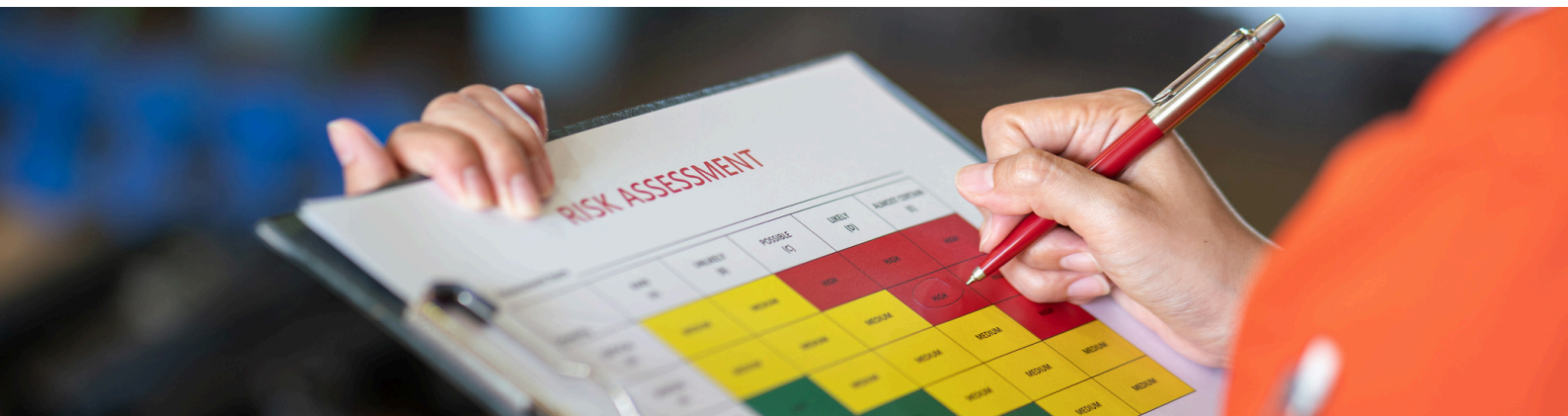
Before any work that could disturb asbestos begins, employers must assess the task and allow sufficient time to establish appropriate safeguards. The assessment should consider the asbestos present, the work involved and the expected exposure. When possible, work that disturbs asbestos should be avoided.

A standard assessment usually details the:

- Type and duration of work.
- Type and quantity of asbestos.
- Expected level of exposure.
- Control measures to reduce exposure.
- PPE and RPE.
- Decontamination arrangements.
- Waste disposal plans.
- Emergency procedures.

As part of the assessment, an asbestos plan of work, also known as a method statement, is created that explains how the task will be carried out safely. Findings and actions must be recorded, communicated to those affected and made available in the workplace. Everyone involved must understand their responsibilities.

Where asbestos cannot be avoided, the HSE specifies an order of control methods: controlled wetting, removal of whole or intact materials while minimising breakage, shadow vacuuming at the source, followed by suitable PPE including respiratory protective equipment.



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How is asbestos identified?

Asbestos can be difficult to identify visually. A survey and laboratory analysis could be required.

What should I do if I discover suspected asbestos?

Stop work immediately, prevent further disturbance and report the discovery.

Is an asbestos risk assessment required before work?

A risk assessment must be completed before any work involving asbestos begins.

Does asbestos work always require a licensed contractor?

Some lower risk work can be non-licensed, provided specific conditions and appropriate controls are met.

What is the duty to manage asbestos?

It requires a responsible person to identify asbestos, assess its condition and manage risks within non-domestic premises.

How should employers prepare their workforce?

Employers must provide appropriate information, instruction and training to employees who may be exposed through their work.



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