Asbestos

Introduction

What is asbestos?

Asbestos is the name given to a range of naturally occurring fibrous materials. There are three main types:

- Crocidolite - often referred to as "Blue" asbestos;
- Amosite - often referred to as "Brown" asbestos;
- Chrysotile - often referred to as "White" asbestos.

All three main types are hazardous, however, blue (crocidolite) and brown (amosite) are more hazardous than white (chrysotile).

Where do you find asbestos in buildings?

Asbestos containing materials have been used extensively in buildings over the past 100 years. Due to its excellent fire and heat retardant qualities it was used in materials from the floor to the roof.

Typically you would find it in:

ROOF & EXTERIOR OF BUILDING

- Roof sheeting and roof felts
- Gutters
- Fascia and soffit boards
- Panels below windows

CEILINGS

- Suspended ceiling tiles
- Textured coatings
- Fire breaks in the ceiling voids

INTERIOR WALLS

- Partition walls
- Panels in electrical cupboards
- Panels in electric heaters
- Panel on fire doors

FLOORS

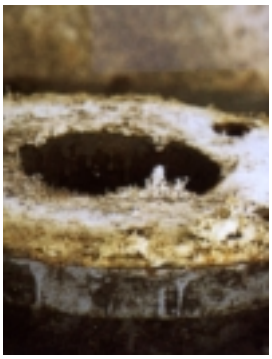
- Vinyl tile
- Linoleum

BOILERS

- Lagging on boilers
- Lagging on pipework
- Insulation on hot water tanks

APPLIANCES

- Gaskets and doors seals in ovens
- Panels on ironing boards
- Old type fire blankets



Why is asbestos hazardous?

Asbestos is a fibrous material. When it is damaged or in poor condition it releases fibres into the air. Breathing in air containing asbestos fibres **can** lead to asbestos related diseases mainly cancer of the lung and chest lining.

How can fibres be released?

Asbestos fibres can be released through:

- Accidental damage of a material containing asbestos;
- Work related activities such as drilling, sawing, breaking;
- Deterioration of the material so that fibres are exposed and the action of draughts, casual contact or mechanical contact releases them.

Who is at risk?

- The groups who are most at risk are those who are involved in drilling, cutting, sawing or breaking the material. They may breathe in asbestos fibres during their day to day work.
- It is now thought possible that repeated low exposures, such as those that could occur during routine repair work, may also lead to cancer.
- It is very unlikely that occasional exposure to low levels of asbestos fibres will result in an asbestos related disease.

Asbestos containing materials in good condition and left undisturbed present no risk to users of the building.

What is being done about asbestos in schools?

The Control of Asbestos at Work (NI) Regulations 2003 require the employer to:

- Identify where asbestos is in all buildings;
- Record its type and condition;
- Carry out a priority risk assessment;
- Maintain an Asbestos Register;
- Regularly inspect the condition.

An asbestos survey of all buildings has been compiled in accordance with the Regulations. An Asbestos Register will be issued to schools where asbestos has been detected. This is a very important document and must be kept available for inspection by any Maintenance Officer or contractors prior to any work being carried out.

Managing the risk

- Minor damage should always be reported.
- Although it is now illegal to use asbestos in the construction or refurbishment of buildings, many thousands of tonnes have been used over the years. Much of it is still in place.

What do I do if I suspect asbestos materials?

You should refer to the school's Asbestos Register.
If you do not have a register you should contact the local Maintenance Officer/helpdesk and give details of:

- Exact location;
- Type of material, e.g. ceiling tile, lagging, etc.;
- Condition of material.

The Maintenance Officer will carry out an initial inspection and contact an accredited surveyor if it is judged to be necessary.

The school will be informed of all survey results.

What do maintenance contractors have to do?

Maintenance contractors (electricians, plumbers, joiners, ceiling fitters, painters, builders, etc.) will be required by the Board to examine the Asbestos Register prior to commencing work in any part of the school. Work will only commence when they have confirmed from the register that the area does not contain any asbestos.