

HEALTH AND SAFETY AT WORK INSPECTORATE INFORMATION DOCUMENT: MANAGING ASBESTOS

Introduction

Asbestos products have been proven to have the potential to cause cancers of the chest and lungs, but asbestos only poses a risk to health if the fibres are released into the air and breathed in. There is no cure for asbestos-related diseases, but as long as asbestos is in good condition and is not being or going to be disturbed or damaged there is no risk and the asbestos should be left alone.

Who is at risk?

Although asbestos is no longer used, people at work in the building maintenance trades may still come across it regularly. Builders carrying out demolition or refurbishment of areas such as suspended ceilings may come into contact with asbestos materials. In fact, anyone who uses premises where asbestos is disturbed and the fibres released can be at risk. Whilst specialist asbestos removal contractors work to strict standards, accidental exposure by the unprepared worker is just as serious as there is now evidence that repeated low exposures may also lead to cancers.

What am I looking for?

All types of asbestos are dangerous, but the materials that contain greater percentages of asbestos and have the higher potential fibre release pose the most risk. Higher risk materials include sprayed asbestos, asbestos lagging, asbestos insulation board and similar materials (this includes all white, brown and blue asbestos). Work with asbestos cement sheet poses the lowest risk and is covered by a separate guidance sheet.

What should I do?

It is difficult to identify asbestos properly without specialist help, but you may already know if asbestos is present in premises that you manage or are working in. It is imperative that you pass this information to anyone who might do any work that could disturb the material.

If you are unsure as to the presence of asbestos in a property, you should do all that you reasonably can to find out. Key points for occupiers, architects, clients or landlords to consider include:

- (i) checking if materials containing asbestos are present by looking at plans, asking others and looking around;
- (ii) checking what condition any suspect material is in and
- (iii) assuming that the material contains asbestos unless you have evidence it does not.

If you are planning to have maintenance work done or if the material is in a poor condition, you should arrange for the material to be sampled and identified by a specialist surveyor. You should record the details of the location, condition and any survey results.

If you are planning to undertake demolition or major refurbishment work a detailed survey must be carried out. Surveyors should follow the HSE guidance

on surveying, sampling and assessing asbestos-containing materials (reference MDHS 100) and will be able to identify any areas where specialist companies need to be involved.

Can I remove asbestos?

No, the removal of high-risk asbestos materials must only be carried out by specialist asbestos contractors. These contractors have specialist training and equipment and ensure that the health of their staff is regularly monitored. You will need to arrange for the asbestos removal work to be monitored and clearance certificates should be obtained to ensure the work has been completed safely.

Details of specialist companies who can assist in surveying properties, analysing samples and removing asbestos can be found in the yellow pages of the telephone directory under Asbestos Surveyors and Removal

Can I leave asbestos in place?

Yes, if the asbestos is in good condition and is unlikely to be disturbed or damaged it is usually safer to leave it and make sure that any asbestos materials are clearly identified in plans and records. You will need to alert anyone who might disturb the material in future and may wish to considering marking materials with the asbestos warning sign.

Disposing of asbestos

Any asbestos material should be double-bagged and properly labelled. You will need to contact the Waste Operations Management Unit on 686540 to arrange for disposal. For advice on other environmental matters or fly-tipped material, contact the Environmental Protection Unit on 685894.

Further advice

There is a large range of guidance available on asbestos. The publications of the Construction Industry Training Board and Health and Safety Executive in the UK are recommended. Further guidance on Isle of Man health and safety legislation and advice on good site practice is available from the Health and Safety at Work Inspectorate, Murray House, Mount Havelock, Douglas IM1 2SF, tel: 685894 and e-mail WorkSafe@dlge.gov.im.

The information in this document is current as at July 2008 and has been prepared by the Health and Safety at Work Inspectorate. This document does not replace any other Health and Safety at Work Inspectorate guidance or affect any existing enforcement procedures: it contains advice for best practice and does not necessarily reflect minimum legislative requirements. Copies of this document are available in electronic format from the Inspectorate.

