

## WORKING WITH ASBESTOS SOFFITS

### Introduction

This guidance has been produced to help those working in the construction industry understand the risks of asbestos insulation board and comply with their duties under health and safety legislation. The guidance is primarily aimed at those who work in the construction industry but domestic householders will also find the information useful when considering home improvements such as the installation of a conservatory.

This guidance does not apply to asbestos cement building materials, such as roof tiles, which pose a lower risk. These materials can be safely dealt with by contractors following the guidance on asbestos cement contained in the Health & Safety at Work Inspectorate guidance sheet “Assessing and removing asbestos cement”.

### What is asbestos insulation board?

Asbestos insulation board (AIB) is a relatively soft that can easily be confused with plasterboard or other sheet construction materials. Asbestos fibres can be released if AIB is significantly disturbed, such as when it is broken up, cut or drilled. As with all asbestos insulation board, AIB soffits must only be removed by licensed asbestos removal contractors taking suitable precautions. General contractors must not be engaged to undertake this work.

The pictures below illustrate the typical location of asbestos insulation board soffits.



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### **Why is asbestos insulation board dangerous?**

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.

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 asbestos insulation board.

### **What are the legal requirements on the Isle of Man?**

Designers, architects, surveyors, landlords and contractors and clients other than domestic householders have duties to people at work and to the general public under the Health & Safety at Work etc Act 1974, as applied to the Island. The introduction of the Construction (Design & Management) Regulations 2003 and the Management of Safety at Work Regulations 2003 in October 2004 will consolidate these duties.

Detailed guidance on the Act and Regulations is available from the Health & Safety at Work Inspectorate.

### **Clients, architects, designers, planning supervisors and members of design teams**

When clients, architects, designers, planning supervisors and members of design teams are specifying construction work that may disturb soffits that may be made of asbestos insulation board, it is essential that before any work is begun a survey is undertaken to establish whether or not the soffits contain asbestos.

A list of surveyors who can undertake this work is contained in our guidance sheet 'Assessing and Removing Asbestos: Sprayed Asbestos, Lagging and Insulation Board'.

If the results of the survey show that the soffits are asbestos insulation board, you have 2 options:

1. Design the work to ensure that the soffits will not be disturbed, for example by over-cladding the existing soffits: you do not need the services of a specialist licensed asbestos removal contractor for this work.
2. Arrange for the removal of the soffits by a specialist licensed asbestos removal contractor prior to any other work starting on site.

Failure to adhere to may put the householder and worker at risk from the uncontrolled release of asbestos material and this could put you in breach of your statutory obligations.

Removal of asbestos insulation board soffits by licensed contractors is subject to the acceptance of specific detailed method statements by and notification to the Health & Safety at Work Inspectorate. You may wish to bear the delays caused by this in mind when estimating completion dates for your intended works.

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**Advice to general builders, installers of conservatories and plastic fascia boards and other home improvement companies**

When preparing estimates for a domestic householder you should be able to identify potential areas where asbestos insulation board may be present. To help you with this, a list of possible uses of asbestos containing materials is available from the Health and safety at Work Inspectorate. You will want to be sure that any work you quote for does not involve disturbing AIB.

You should not start any work that could disturb asbestos insulation board until you have arranged for a through survey and acted upon its findings. Do not be tempted to remove asbestos insulation board yourself: as well as penetrating your lungs and those of your customers, asbestos fibres can be taken home on your work clothes to expose your family.

**Further Guidance**

There are various publications available on construction safety, the publications of the Construction Industry Training Board and the Health & Safety Executive in the UK are recommended.

Further information can be obtained from the Health & Safety at Work Inspectorate, Murray House, Douglas by telephoning 685952 or by visiting our web site: [www.gov.im/dlge/](http://www.gov.im/dlge/) (go to 'Health & Safety' and then 'Publications').

The information in this document is current at 19<sup>th</sup> March 2004 and has been prepared by the Health & Safety at Work Inspectorate. This document does not replace any other Health & Safety at Work guidance or affect any existing enforcement procedures: it contains advice for best practice and does not necessarily reflect minimum legislative requirements.