

Asbestos Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is asbestos?

Asbestos is the name given to a group of fibrous minerals which occur naturally in the earth. These are grouped into two mineral types known as serpentine and amphibole.

The most common types of asbestos fibre used are chrysotile (white) asbestos which is a serpentine mineral, while amosite (brown) and crocidolite (blue) asbestos are amphibole minerals. The colours are seen in clean fibres and may not be clearly visible when the fibres are mixed with other material.

Asbestos was widely used in buildings, vehicles and domestic and industrial items because of its chemical and physical properties of high tensile strength, flexibility, chemical and heat resistance and good thermal and electrical insulation properties.

2. Health Effects

Asbestos disease is caused by breathing in very fine fibres. As asbestos fibres accumulate in the lungs, several types of disease may occur.

Asbestosis: - is a scarring of the lung tissue caused by breathing in asbestos fibre over a period of many years. This leads to a progressive loss of elasticity and lung function. It is a slowly developing disease with a latency period (time between exposure and onset of disease) of 15 to 20 years.

Mesothelioma: - is a cancer of the lining of the lungs (pleura) or more rarely of the lining of the abdominal cavity (peritoneum). Mesothelioma has a long latency period, averaging between 35 to 40 years; however this may vary between 15 and 67 years. The disease is almost always associated with asbestos exposure.

Lung Cancer: - is a malignant tumour of the bronchi of the lungs. The tumour grows through the surrounding tissue, invading and often obstructing passages.

Individuals exposed to asbestos have an increased risk of developing lung cancer which is further increased by smoking. Again the disease has a long latency period of approximately 20 years.

Diffuse Pleural Thickening: - is a non-malignant disease in which the lining of the lungs (pleura) become scarred. Pleural plaques do not normally cause impairment of lung function or associated disability.

The risk of developing an asbestos disease is related to the type of asbestos, and, the duration and level of exposure. Mesothelioma is more likely to be associated with crocidolite and amosite than with chrysotile

Further information can be found in Health and Safety Executive Guidance MS13, Asbestos: Medical Guidance Note – www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/ms13.pdf

EMAS (the Employment Medical Advisory Service) provides expert advice on medical matters.

- Contact No. 028 90 408004
- E-mail: emasmail@detini.gov.uk

3. How can I tell if I have asbestos in my house?

Asbestos products were widely used in building materials, including insulation and fire protection. Items that may have contained asbestos in the past include:

- Asbestos cement products- used for roofing materials, roof tiles, guttering and soffit boards.
- Insulation board- used for fire protection, thermal and acoustic insulation and can be found internally as partitions, wall linings and ceiling materials.
- PVC flooring and vinyl floor tiles- some products contained asbestos or were backed with asbestos containing paper.

Asbestos is only a risk to health if the fibres become airborne and are breathed into the lungs. Asbestos containing products that are in good condition do not represent a significant risk unless they are damaged or abraded, and should be left undisturbed.

You cannot tell if a product contains asbestos just by looking at it. If you need to work on or around any materials that you think may contain asbestos you should have a sample of the material analysed before you carry out any work.

Taking the sample yourself is not recommended as there is risk of fibre release during the sampling process. You should employ a competent person to take a sample of the material and have it analysed by a UKAS accredited laboratory - You can find details of accredited laboratories on the UKAS website at www.ukas.org/testing

If you do take a sample yourself, ensure that the material is dampened (use water with washing-up liquid) and that you do not create dust or allow the spread of the material. Clean up afterwards using a damp rag and include the rag with the sample. Seal the broken edge with paint or other sealant. Contact your chosen laboratory to arrange delivery. There will normally be a charge for this service.

4 What should I do if I have asbestos in my house?

This will depend on the type and condition of the asbestos containing material (ACM). Asbestos fibre is safe provided that it remains bonded within the material in which it is used and that the fibre does not become airborne. There is no danger unless fibres are released and inhaled into the lungs.

Generally material in good condition will not release asbestos fibres.

If the ACM is in good condition and unlikely to be disturbed it can be left in place. You should check its condition regularly for signs of deterioration.

If the ACM is in poor condition, or becomes damaged, or if you are going to make changes in your home that might disturb it, then you will need to have it repaired or removed.

The person who does this work should be competent to work with asbestos. Contractors must comply with the Control of Asbestos Regulations (NI) 2007.

Advice on how to carry out tasks which involve asbestos, but which do not require a license, can be found within HSEGB's Asbestos Essentials at www.hse.gov.uk/asbestos/essentials/index.htm.

These show the standard of work that you should require of your contractor. Make sure he is aware of it.

If the work involves asbestos insulation, asbestos insulating board or asbestos coatings the contractor must also be licensed under the Control of Asbestos Regulations (NI) 2007.

5. How do I get rid of asbestos waste?

ACM's are classified as 'Hazardous Waste' and must not be disposed of with household waste. The material should be double wrapped in labelled polythene sacks or sheeting before they are transported for disposal at a licensed waste disposal site. Try not to break the material; if you have to cut, break or otherwise disturb it, you should take appropriate precautions which are shown here -

www.hse.gov.uk/asbestos/essentials/index.htm

Where asbestos waste is produced by the householder, or by someone acting on behalf of the householder and NOT for gain, the options are:-

a) Employ a licensed waste disposal contractor or a licensed asbestos contractor (as long as he is also a licensed carrier) to arrange disposal on your behalf; or

b) Arrange to bring it to a licensed site. – you will need to contact the site in advance to find out what conditions they require. A private householder does not require a carrier's license or a consignment note.

Where asbestos waste is produced by a contractor (plumber, joiner, builder or other acting for gain), the contractor is responsible for disposing of the waste. To do this they must hold a carrier's license (issued by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency) and a consignment note relating to the particular load being disposed of. The material can only be brought to one of the locations licensed to accept it.

Alternatively, the contractor can employ another contractor who is licensed to carry and dispose of such waste.

A list of registered waste carriers can be found at
<http://www.ni-environment.gov.uk/carriers?list=All>

A list of licensed asbestos removal contractors can be found at
[http://www.hseni.gov.uk/licensed asbestos contractors oct 09.doc](http://www.hseni.gov.uk/licensed_asbestos_contractors_oct_09.doc)

Sites licensed to accept asbestos waste:

McQuillan Enviro-care
Newpark Industrial Estate
Caulside Drive
Antrim BT41 2DV
(www.mcquillanenvirocare.com)
☎ 028 9446 6708 Contact: Kay Branagh

Eastwood Envirowaste
18 Crosshill Road
Crumlin BT29 4BQ
(www.eastwoodltd.com)
☎ 028 9445 9000 Contact: Darwin Duggan

SITA UK (Formerly Wilson Waste Management Ltd)
110-114 Duncrue Street
Belfast BT3 9AR
(www.sita.co.uk)
☎ 028 9074 7341 Contact: Harold Bennett or Sean McGovern

Quinn - environmental
Lisbane Landfill Site
29 Aughlish Road
Tandragee
BT62 2EE
(www.quinn-environmental.com)
☎ 028 388 49875 Contact: John Rogers

Please note that this information below was correct at the time of writing. You are advised to check the current status of sites on the following link:
www.ni-environment.gov.uk/website_licenses.pdf

6. **What regulations cover work with asbestos?**

The Control of Asbestos Regulations (NI) 2007 apply to all work activity with ACM's.

The regulations are supported by two 'Approved Codes of Practice and Guidance' (ACOP)

Work with materials containing asbestos L143 HSE Books ISBN 0 7176-6206 3.

The management of asbestos in non-domestic premises L127 HSE Books ISBN 0 7176 6209 8.

The Approved Codes of Practice give practical advice on how to comply with the Regulations. If you follow the advice, you will be doing enough to comply with the Regulations.

7. **Can I reuse asbestos cement?**

The Control of Asbestos Regulations (NI) 2007 prohibits the supply of asbestos products.

Supply is defined as the sale, lease, hire, hire-purchase, loan, gift or an exchange for a consideration other than money.

This means that all forms of asbestos and products which have had asbestos added to them during manufacture, cannot be supplied for re-use.

Where asbestos materials were in place before 2 May 2000 they can remain provided they are in good condition and properly managed.

8. **Should I avoid buying a house that contains some asbestos material?**

When buying a house, there are many factors you need to consider, including condition, location, price as well as the presence of ACM. There are a number of factors relating to asbestos, which you should consider:

- What type of asbestos product is it?
- Where is the asbestos material?
- Is it in good repair?
- Is it accessible to the occupants?
- Can it become damaged?
- Can I prevent damage?
- Cost of removal and disposal now or in future?

Asbestos cement is considered a low risk material provided that it remains in good condition. The asbestos fibres are tightly bound in the cement matrix and will not be released unless it becomes badly damaged or broken. Other low risk materials include asbestos-containing vinyl floor tiles and textured paint, if they are in good condition.

Sprayed asbestos, thermal insulation on pipe work, asbestos ropes and packing, insulation boards and ceiling tiles all contain a higher percentage of asbestos. The fibres are not as tightly bound in the matrix and there is a higher risk of them becoming airborne, particularly if the material becomes damaged.

Details on asbestos products can be found in Health and Safety Executive Guidance MDHS 100 –
www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/mdhs/pdfs/mdhs100.pdf

9. **I think I have been exposed to asbestos. What should I do?**

Recently published research suggests that single or low level exposures are very unlikely to lead to disease and the risks with such an exposure are considered “insignificant”. Disease associated with asbestos exposure occurs through breathing in asbestos fibre as dust. The chance of developing a disease is related to the amount of fibre inhaled and the duration of exposure. If you think you may have been exposed, you may wish to discuss your concerns with your doctor. At this stage a full medical examination or x-ray would not be beneficial since it takes many years for the effects of asbestos to appear.

If you have been accidentally exposed to asbestos in your place of work, as a result of a fibre release, your employers must investigate the incident and must report it the Health & Safety Executive NI.

If you undertake licensable asbestos work then your employer is required to ensure that you are under adequate medical surveillance by an Appointed Doctor. This can be arranged through EMAS (the Employment Medical Advisory Service).

- Contact No. 028 90 408004
- E-mail: emasmail@detini.gov.uk

Your employer has other duties under the Control of Asbestos Regulations (NI) 2007

Further information can be found in Health and Safety Executive MS13 Asbestos: Medical Guidance Note –
www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/ms13.pdf

10. **What is an asbestos register?**

All buildings which are non-domestic must have an asbestos register which shows where any asbestos containing material (ACM) is present. This

information must be readily available and must be given to anyone who is liable to disturb the asbestos. Anyone undertaking work can ask to see the register if they suspect that there is a possibility that they may disturb the ACM. If they are still suspicious, they can ask for further information.

This requirement applies to all buildings which are non-domestic; this includes the common areas in blocks of flats

11. What is an asbestos survey?

An asbestos survey is usually carried out to enable the premises manager to compile the asbestos register. There are two main types of survey:-

- Management Surveys which are designed to get information on the location, type and condition of any ACM. This information is used to make an assessment of any risk and to prepare an asbestos management plan.
- The second type of survey is called a pre-demolition or pre-major refurbishment survey, and it is required so that all the ACM can be identified and removed from a building before other work commences. It is sometimes referred to as a Type 3 survey.

Further information on asbestos surveys can be found in MDHS100 www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/mdhs/pdfs/mdhs100.pdf

12. Do I have to have training to work with asbestos cement?

Yes. Even though work with asbestos cement is normally non-licensable, you must still be competent to work with it and this means that you must have appropriate training. Regulation 10 of The Control of Asbestos (NI) 2007 covers this point.

13. How do I find out about Licensed Contractors?

All work involving asbestos insulation, asbestos insulating board and asbestos coatings must be carried out by a contractor licensed under The Control of Asbestos Regulations (NI) 2007

HSENI is the licensing authority under these Regulations.

Information on licensed asbestos removal contractors is available from:

Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland,
83 Ladas Drive,
Belfast,

BT6 9FR
Phone 0800 0320 121
E-mail asbestos@detini.gsi.gov.uk

A list of licensed asbestos removal contractors can be found at
http://www.hseni.gov.uk/licensed_asbestos_contractors_oct_09.doc

14. What is the difference between licensed and non-licensed asbestos work?

Most asbestos work will require a license. Work with asbestos-containing materials which is more likely to release asbestos fibres is considered to be higher risk and must be undertaken by a contractor who is licensed to do this work by the Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland. The type of work would involve disturbing asbestos insulation, asbestos insulation board etc. This work must be carried out under strictly controlled conditions, for example, within a sealed enclosure.

Non-licensed work involves lower risk materials such as asbestos cement, for example, the corrugated panels that are frequently found on garage roofs. This type of work must be carried out by a contractor who has been trained in regard to asbestos.

Under Regulation 3(2) of the Control of Asbestos Regulations (NI) 2009, you do not need a license to work with asbestos if:

- the exposure of employees to asbestos is sporadic and of low intensity (i.e. the concentration of asbestos in air does not exceed 0.6 f/cm³ measured over a 10 minute period);
- the control limit is not exceeded (0.1 f/cm³ averaged over a 4 hour period)

and

- the work involves short, non continuous maintenance activities;
- the removal of materials in which the asbestos fibres are firmly linked in a matrix; or
- encapsulation or sealing of asbestos-containing materials which are in good condition; or
- air monitoring and control, and the collection and analysis of samples to ascertain whether a specific material contains asbestos.

You must still be careful with this type of material as poor working practices, for example breaking the material up into small pieces, can generate significant fibre levels in the air.

Remember, that these work activities are only exempt from licensing, and the rest of the Regulations, relating to risk assessments, plans of work, training,

controls (including respiratory protective equipment), welfare facilities etc. will still apply.

The [Approved Code of Practice](#) provides detailed information on licensed and non-licensed work.