Asbestos Awareness

Toolbox Talk
ASBESTOS AWARENESS

Why is it a Problem

Asbestos was extensively used as a building material in the UK from the 1950s through to the mid-1980s.

It was used for a variety of purposes and was ideal for fireproofing and insulation. Any building built before 2000 (houses, factories, offices, schools, hospitals etc) can contain asbestos.

Asbestos materials in good condition are safe unless asbestos fibres become airborne, which happens when materials are damaged.

Why is Asbestos Dangerous

Asbestos fibres are present in the environment in Great Britain so people are exposed to very low levels of fibres. However, a key factor in the risk of developing an asbestos-related disease is the total number of fibres breathed in.

Working on or near damaged asbestos-containing materials or breathing in high levels of asbestos fibres, which may be many hundreds of times that of environmental levels could increase your chances of getting an asbestos-related disease.

When these fibres are inhaled they can cause serious diseases which are responsible for around 4000 deaths a year.

Asbestos breaks into tiny, long, sharp fibres. They can get lodged and scar the lungs, causing asbestosis or fibrosis.

There are three main diseases caused by asbestos: mesothelioma (which is always fatal), lung cancer (almost always fatal) and asbestosis (not always fatal, but it can be very debilitating).

Remember, these diseases will not affect you immediately but later on in life, so there is a need for you to protect yourself now to prevent you contracting an asbestos-related disease in the future.

It is also important to remember that people who smoke and are also exposed to asbestos fibres are at a much greater risk of developing lung cancer.

Where you will find Asbestos

Insulation and sprayed coatings used for:

Boilers, plant, pipework in the roof space and also hidden in underfloor ducting

Fire protection to steelwork, hidden behind false ceilings
Thermal and acoustic insulation of buildings

Some textured coatings and paints

Friction materials such as brake linings and clutch plates

Gaskets and packings in engines, heating and ventilation systems.

**Insulating board used in the following places:**

- Fire protection to doors, protected exits and steelwork
- Claddings on walls and ceilings
- Internal walls, partitions and suspended ceiling tiles.

**Asbestos cement, which is found as:**

- Corrugated roofing and cladding sheets of buildings
- Flat sheets for partitions, cladding and door facings
- Rainwater gutters and downpipes.

**When am I at Risk from Asbestos**

When you are working on an unfamiliar site

The building you are working on was built before the year 2000

Asbestos-containing materials were not identified before the job was started

Asbestos-containing materials were identified but this information was not passed on by the people in charge to the people doing the work

You don't know how to recognise and work safely with asbestos

You know how to work safely with asbestos but you choose to put yourself at risk by not following proper precautions, perhaps to save time or because no one else is following proper procedures

Remember, as long as the asbestos is not damaged or located somewhere where it can be easily damaged it won't be a risk to you.

You can't see or smell asbestos fibres in the air.

The effects of asbestos may take many years to show up - avoid breathing it in now.
Smoking increases the risk many times.

Asbestos is only a danger when fibres are made airborne
Are you sure that you don't come in to contact with asbestos?

If you work in any of the following occupations, and are working on a building built or refurbished before 2000, you may come in to contact with asbestos:

- Heating and ventilation engineers
- Demolition workers
- Carpenters and joiners
- Plumbers
- Roofing contractors
- Painters and decorators
- Plasterers
- Construction workers
- Fire and burglar alarm installers
- Shop fitters
- Gas fitters
- Computer installers
- General maintenance staff e.g. caretakers
- Telecommunications engineers
- Building surveyors
- Cable layers
- Electricians

This list does not include all occupations where you may come in to contact with asbestos.
Asbestos Insulating Board

Flooring

Asbestos Textiles
Electrical Switchgear

Asbestos Bakelite

Asbestos Bitumen

Asbestos Gaskets
Asbestos Ceiling Tiles

Asbestos Roof Tile Examples
Hazardous work

Plumbers, carpenters, electricians and roofers working on building repair are considered most at risk.

Old buildings constructed in the 1950s and 60s may have many forms of asbestos materials used in them.

The removal of roofing felts, cladding, old floor tiles, textured paints and plasters containing asbestos.

It's not easy to tell asbestos from how it looks, and it needs to be properly identified in a specialist laboratory.

If you think you've come across asbestos, stop work and tell your supervisor or foreman.

Apart from most chrysotile (white) asbestos, where the fibres are firmly linked in a matrix of cement, vinyl bitumen and the like, crocidolite (blue) and amosite (brown) must only be removed by a licenced contractor.

What Can You do to Protect Yourself

Request the asbestos register or survey results before starting work.

Stop and ask if you are suspicious something may be asbestos.

Isolate the area and make others aware.

What should those in charge of the job do?

They must:

Find out if asbestos-containing materials are present and plan the work to avoid disturbing these materials if possible.

Ensure that anyone who is going to work on asbestos material is trained properly and is supervised.

Know what work can be carried out on asbestos-containing materials, i.e. does this work need to be carried out by a contractor licensed by HSE.

Take account of other risks as well as asbestos, e.g. work at height, and take the precautions necessary to do the job safely.

Use the equipment and correct methodology to make sure that the job is carried out properly and that exposure to asbestos is kept as low as possible.
Prepare a plan of work, explaining what the job involves, the work procedures, and what controls to use

Provide you with the right equipment, which is clean, in good working order, and protects you against asbestos

Train you in using this equipment

Make sure the work area is inspected visually at the end of the job, to check it's fit for reoccupation

Make arrangements for the safe disposal of any asbestos waste

Consult the health and safety representative (if there is one)

What does the law require?

There are a number of sets of regulations, which cover work with all types of asbestos-containing material; they place duties on 'dutyholders', employers and the self employed. A quick summary of these regulations can be found in the asbestos regulations.

**REMEMBER IF YOU SUSPECT ASBESTOS, STOP WORK IMMEDIATELY AND TELL YOUR SUPERVISOR.**

By signing below you confirm that you have read and understood this asbestos toolbox talk:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name:</th>
<th>Signature:</th>
<th>Date:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>