



Act Now on asbestos

What asbestos is, who is at risk, and the questions safety reps can ask to make their workplace safer.

Asbestos is the name given to a group of naturally occurring minerals made up of microscopic fibres. It has been mined for hundreds of years and was used in many industries throughout the 1950s, 60s and 70s because of its strong insulation and fireproof properties.

80%+

of all schools contain asbestos, as do many public buildings, including hospitals.

1999

the year the UK banned asbestos totally. Buildings built or refurbished before 2000 may still contain it.

10–40

years: the typical time asbestos-related diseases take to develop after exposure.

Three main types, **all of them dangerous**

White

Used mainly in the walls, ceilings and floors of homes and workplaces, to insulate pipes and in the automotive industry.

Brown

Used mainly in cement sheets and pipe insulation, and commonly found in ceiling tiles and thermal insulation products.

An extremely high cancer risk.

Blue

Commonly used to insulate steam engines and pipes, and found in plastics and certain types of cement.

Why it is still **around**

It was popular for its fireproof qualities: a non-flammable and virtually indestructible material, with fibres that could be mixed with cement or woven into fabric and mats.

It was used extensively in construction, shipbuilding and manufacturing, before the dangers of breathing in the fibres were discovered.

The **diseases** it causes

Mesothelioma

Lung cancer

Asbestosis

Pleural thickening

These diseases are often fatal.

Anyone exposed can be affected. That includes workers and their families, if fibres are brought home on work clothes and belongings.

Checklist for taking action on asbestos in the workplace

Hazards

- 1 Ask your employer whether asbestos is present in any part of the workplace.
- 2 If there is asbestos on the premises, ask for a copy of the asbestos survey. Make sure it covers all buildings and records where all the asbestos is.
- 3 Ask who the competent person is who completed the risk assessment, and who is responsible for maintaining and checking the asbestos.
- 4 Does the survey say specifically where the asbestos is, and when it was last checked?
- 5 Have all places and items that contain asbestos been clearly labelled?
- 6 Is there a procedure to check and inform contractors where any asbestos is located within a building, before any work is carried out?
- 7 Are all staff given regular asbestos awareness training, appropriate to their role, so they know where it is and how to avoid disturbing it?
- 8 Do all staff know where and how to record any concerns about the asbestos?
- 9 Does the Asbestos Management Plan (AMP) say who is responsible for managing asbestos in all parts of the workplace, and specifically who the duty holder is?
- 10 Does the AMP include a regular schedule (at least every 6 to 12 months) for monitoring the condition of the asbestos, with spot checks, and say how any risks will be communicated to staff?
- 11 Are there known procedures to record any exposure and to inform employees who may have been exposed?
- 12 Are union safety reps fully consulted on all aspects of asbestos management, including being told the licences and qualifications of contractors who remove it?
- 13 Is the information from the survey recorded on a register that staff, visitors and contractors can see?
- 14 If anyone has reason to believe that material containing asbestos has been damaged, and could pose a serious risk of exposure, is there a procedure to make sure everyone leaves the area?
- 15 If asbestos is to be removed, does the plan clearly state how the work will be done, who will do it and how all risks will be controlled?
- 16 Is there a periodic review of all procedures, and a regular item on the Safety Committee agenda?

Keeping a work history

If a worker has been exposed to asbestos, check whether your trade union keeps a register. Alternatively, log the exposure in writing with the employer and with the worker's GP.

If anyone develops an asbestos-related disease, contact the trade union legal team. Asbestos victims' support groups can also give more information and advice.

Legal and other standards for prevention and control

- The Control of Asbestos Regulations (CAWR) 2012
- Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations 1977
- Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974
- Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999
- Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2015
- Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992



FREE FOR EVERY WORKER

Worried about safety at work?

Scan for free advice, and fourteen more free guides like this one.

gmhazards.org.uk • 0161 884 4229

HSE asbestos website

hse.gov.uk/asbestos/index.htm

Hazards Magazine: asbestos

hazards.org/asbestos/index.htm

Asbestos Victims Forum

asbestosforum.org.uk

Hazards

gmhazards.org.uk
Instagram @gmhazardscentre