

Toolbox Talk

Asbestos

Asbestos is a hazard to health when airborne fibres are breathed in, this is because the human lung is unable to expel or break the fibres down. Asbestos material in poor condition breaks down into tiny, long, sharp fibres. However if the material is in good condition it is safe to handle carefully. All work with asbestos must comply with the Control of Asbestos Regulations and may need to be carried out by a licensed contractor.

Products that asbestos can be found in:

Asbestos was commonly used in construction products from the mid-1940s reaching a peak in the mid-1970s. It was banned from use in the UK in 1999. It is estimated that there are over 3500 building products produced with an asbestos content.

Insulation and sprayed coating using moulded or pre-formed lagging, such as boilers, plant and pipe-work, fire protection to steelwork and thermal and acoustic insulation to buildings.

Insulation board, such as fire protection to doors, cladding on walls and ceilings, partitioning, ceiling tiles, fire breaks in ceiling voids, electrical equipment and service risers and general building board.

Asbestos cement, such as corrugated roof sheets, flat sheets for cladding and partitions roof and rainwater drainage goods, underground pipes, bath panels, artificial roof slates, flue pipes and general building board.

Other materials; vinyl or thermoplastic floor tiles, insulation of electrical equipment, some textured coating (eg Artex), Bakelite sanitary ware and other products and bitumen.

Locating asbestos is a job for an asbestos surveyor.

Where you will come across Asbestos:

You are most likely to come across asbestos in sheet building materials and a variety of building products used in buildings. In any refurbishment to a building build before 2000 there is a chance of asbestos being present. Where canals have been filled in following abandonment, tipped material may contain asbestos. Fly-tipping of materials containing asbestos along canal banks is also a problem.

What should you do if you come across Asbestos?

Avoid disturbing any asbestos and report it to your Leader or restoration group supervisor. There are strict rules about moving and disposing of asbestos and any waste containing asbestos will be classified as contaminated. Install barriers around any asbestos and provide warning signage.



Asbestos related diseases are:

Asbestos-related lung cancer, caused by exposure to asbestos fibres.

Asbestosis, scarring of the lung tissue from exposure to asbestos, causes progressive shortness of breath and can be fatal.

Mesothelioma, cancer of the pleura (the thin, protective membrane surrounding the lungs, heart and abdominal cavity) caused, only, by exposure to asbestos and can take up to 50 years before symptoms develop. It is fatal in all cases.

Pleural thickening, the lining of the lung thickens and swells after heavy exposure to asbestos and causes discomfort in the lungs and shortness of breath.