

DANGER ASBESTOS

Asbestos is the term used for a range of fibrous naturally occurring minerals with characteristics that seemingly made them ideal materials with which to build or protect items or areas from heat.

Whilst it was known long ago that asbestos had a harmful effect on health, its use was not banned until relatively recent times, in which time many millions of hazards to long term health were generated for the modern day contractor to avoid.

CHRYBOTILE

Known as white asbestos. The flexibility of the fibres and heat resistance properties meant Chrysotile was commonly used in everything from brake linings, gaskets and boiler seals to insulation for fire protection in buildings and the lagging of pipes.

It is also commonly found in roofing materials and cladding where the fibres were bound in with cement.

AMOSITE

Known as brown asbestos Amosite was a key ingredient in the formation of Asbestos Insulation Board (AIB) sometimes on its own or mixed with Chrysotile.

AIB was commonly used for fire protection in buildings on walls and ceilings, or around any source of heat that needed to be controlled.

CROCIDILITE

Known as blue asbestos Crocidilite was commonly used in spray coatings, pipe lagging and loose fill insulation. The friability of spray coatings makes them particularly hazardous.



KEEP ASBESTOS IN YOUR SIGHTS BEFORE IT TARGETS YOU

WORKING AROUND ASBESTOS

Always refer to your company procedures and risk assessments for actions to be undertaken or reported when working around asbestos.

Each site should have an asbestos register. That register should include the location, type and condition of all asbestos containing materials on site. All those materials should be suitably marked.

Assume nothing though. Approach each set of materials as though they contain asbestos, disturb little and check frequently what you might be working with.

Much work on asbestos containing materials (ACM's) has to be licenced and conducted by licenced practitioners. If in doubt check.

For a good source of practical information see the Health and Safety Executive's "Asbestos essentials" web page.

There you will find advice, guidance and method sheets for minor works.

When using RPE (Respiratory Protective Equipment) never leave the mask where it can collect dust, including hanging around your neck.

see em6 asbestos essentials

If you have information about the whereabouts of asbestos or suspected asbestos you have a duty to inform the dutyholder.

see the HSE "Managing asbestos in buildings" guide

Dutyholders should presume building materials contain asbestos "unless there is strong evidence they do not".

See the HSE Managing and Working with Asbestos inc ACOP's L127 and L143

What are the long term risks of breathing asbestos fibres?

Breathing difficulty, pulmonary disease including pleural thickening, cancer of the lining of the lungs or tummy, and lung cancer.

If asbestos contamination might be present during a task you should choose safety boots without laces as these are easier to clean.

see em6 asbestos essentials

Asbestos waste should be double wrapped in plastic with the correct hazard warning signs attached.

see em9 asbestos essentials

Read the HSE's guide on accidentally disturbing asbestos during work. Asbestos essentials em1 contains guidance on keeping yourself and your colleagues safe.

see em1 asbestos essentials

Where asbestos is in good condition it should be labeled where possible and monitored at regular intervals.

see HSE "Managing asbestos in buildings" guide