



JUAC HEALTH & SAFETY REP ADVICE SHEET

ASBESTOS IN SCHOOLS

What is asbestos?

Asbestos is a name used for a range of minerals. There are three main types of asbestos; blue (crocidolite), brown (amosite) and white (chrysotile), however, the type of asbestos cannot be identified by its colour alone. All types of asbestos can be dangerous.

Why is asbestos dangerous?

Asbestos is made up of thin fibres. Asbestos fibres are only dangerous if they become airborne and are breathed in, but ALL types of asbestos fibres are potentially fatal if the fibres are breathed and become stuck in the lungs and damage them. The main types of cancers caused by asbestos are cancer of the lung and cancer of the lining of the lung (mesothelioma). These diseases can take from 15 to 60 years to develop. There is no cure for mesothelioma.

Where do you find asbestos in schools?

Most school buildings built or refurbished before 1985 contain asbestos and any school built before 2000 may contain asbestos. From the 1950s it was used extensively for school refurbishment or new builds. The most common uses of asbestos in school buildings were:

- spray fire insulation e.g. on structural beams and girders, roof sheeting, wall cladding, boiler flues, gutters, rainwater pipes, water tanks;
- insulation boards e.g. ceiling tiles, partition walls, heater cupboards and equipment such as protective mats in laboratories;
- asbestos cement products such as wall and ceiling panels, corrugated roof panels, tiles, gutters, pipes and decorative plaster-type finishes; and
- lagging e.g. pipe work, insulating jackets for cold water tanks and boilers.

What are the risks in schools?

How dangerous the asbestos is depends on the type of asbestos and the type of material it is contained in, the condition of the material and how likely it is to be disturbed. Asbestos material in schools is old and if it has not been properly maintained it is likely to be deteriorating. Also vandalism makes schools more vulnerable to the risk of release of asbestos fibres. In 2011 the government's advisory committee on science concluded that "safe" thresholds of exposure are not identifiable. 305 teachers in the UK died from mesothelioma between 1980 and 2013. In 2011 the Supreme Court confirmed a compensation payment to the family of a 49-year-old mesothelioma victim exposed to asbestos whilst a pupil at school. In 2016 an inquest ruled that a primary school teacher died from mesothelioma after decades of asbestos exposure in the schools where she worked.

For every teacher there are around 20 pupils. Children are known to be more vulnerable to the risks of



asbestos because of their age, as mesothelioma has a long latency period. It has been estimated that around 200-300 adults die each year because of exposure to asbestos when they were a pupil at school.

The Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012

Under the 2012 Regulations the duty to manage asbestos rests with the duty holder. For maintained schools this is the local authority; for voluntary aided and foundation schools it is the governing body; and for independent schools, academies and other independent establishments it is the proprietors, governors or trustees. Whilst ultimate responsibility remains with the duty holder, the practical task of managing the asbestos can be delegated to the school. The duty holder must ensure that those individuals to whom the task has been delegated are trained and competent in managing the asbestos in the school. Asbestos management should follow normal risk assessment practice in the same way as any other hazard. The Regulations require a written asbestos management plan setting out what steps are to be taken to manage the asbestos. A basic first step in asbestos management is to identify the extent, type and condition of asbestos in a building so that measures can be taken to ensure that it is safely managed.

Asbestos Survey

The duty holder must take reasonable steps to find out if there are materials containing asbestos in the premises and, if so, how much, where they are and what condition they are in. This is usually done by a person competent carrying out an asbestos survey. The survey should cover all parts of the building and the results of the survey should be recorded in an Asbestos Register and the information provided to anyone who may work on, or disturb, these materials.

ACTION POINTS

- Check all asbestos has been identified, recorded and marked
- Check all asbestos is in good condition/sealed and monitored

Asbestos Management Plan

Your school must have written plans setting out how the risks from any potential asbestos materials are to be managed. They should include:

- a policy statement and management procedures;
- a timetable and priorities for action on removal or encapsulation;
- arrangements for monitoring materials left in place;
- staff responsibilities;
- arrangements for informing and training staff, including contractors;
- dealing with emergency situations;
- review arrangements.

The duty holder must assess and identify the presence of asbestos and measure the likelihood of those materials being disturbed by carrying out a priority risk assessment. The HSE has a model priority risk assessment for schools on pages 55-59 of its guidance on managing asbestos which is available at <http://www.hse.gov.uk/pUbns/priced/hsg227.pdf>.



ACTION POINTS

- Request a copy of the Asbestos Register and Asbestos Management Plan (AMP)
- Undertake regular work inspections using the Asbestos Register and AMP
- Check the AMP is kept up-to-date and has been clearly communicated to all staff
- Check the AMP is being followed and is reviewed at least annually

Contractors

Maintenance or building work can easily damage asbestos materials. Stringent measures are needed to ensure that contractors are trained, know of the presence of asbestos and are tightly controlled. A suitable risk assessment carried out by a competent person must be made before carrying out any work which may expose occupants to asbestos. There should be a plan of work which sets out:

- the location of any asbestos;
- how the work will be carried out;
- how waste will be removed;
- how the work will be monitored; and
- how staff will be kept informed.

ACTION POINTS

- Check the contractor is competent
- Request a copy of the risk assessment and work plans
- Report any concerns immediately to the duty holder, keep records of the concerns and any action taken

Emergency Services

The Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012 require employers to notify the emergency services of the location and condition of asbestos in the premises. Asbestos is likely to be disturbed during an emergency such as a fire. Therefore, the emergency services need to be aware of the presence of asbestos so they can take appropriate precautions to prevent exposure to pupils, staff and themselves.

ACTION POINTS

- Check if your employer has passed this information onto the emergency services
- If they haven't, remind them that it is a legal requirement that they do so

Information, Instruction and Training

Your employer must provide adequate training (which includes information and instruction) to all employees who are or who are liable to be exposed to asbestos, or who supervise such employees. The training must be given at regular intervals. It needs to be proportionate, it should contain the appropriate level of detail and it should be suitable to the individual's role and responsibilities.



Exposure

Your employer has a duty to prevent exposure so far as is reasonably practicable. If asbestos is identified as being in a deteriorated or damaged condition, the immediate action is to evacuate and seal the area off immediately. Your employer should have arrangements to deal with accidents, incidents and emergencies.

ACTION POINTS

- Request a copy of the schools arrangements for dealing with asbestos incidents
- Check all staff know what the school's arrangements are and who is responsible for what
- Advise anyone who suspects that they may have been exposed to contact their GP and Union
- Discuss with the employer occupational health support and surveillance
- Fully record the incident, take part in the investigation, request a copy of the final report and record all action taken
- Request a copy of any HSE report or recommendations

Governors /Parents

Governors are responsible for monitoring and evaluating health and safety of the school. Parents have an interest in the safe management of asbestos in schools.

ACTION POINTS FOR GOVERNORS and PARENTS

- Ask to see the Asbestos Register and Asbestos Management Plan
- Check the Plan is being followed and is reviewed at least annually
- Ask to see the schools arrangements for asbestos incidents

Asbestos in WWI and WWII Gas Masks and Helmets

In response to pressure from JUAC, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) issued a warning to schools which stated that staff and pupils should never touch or wear wartime gas masks or helmets as they may contain asbestos. If any gas masks or helmets are present in schools, they should be double-bagged immediately and disposed of appropriately. The full JUAC warning on vintage gas masks is available at <http://www.juac.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2015/06/Gas-Masks-Warning.pdf>.

Asbestos in Air Cabinet Heaters

Warm air cabinet heaters were commonly built in schools. Asbestos Insulating Board (AIB) was regularly used in the construction of these heaters until 1980 when production of AIB ceased. Air Sampling has confirmed the potential for air cabinet heaters to release asbestos fibres. Because of this, JUAC strongly recommends that any AIB in the heaters is removed, and the units are removed if this is recommended by a qualified asbestos consultant. More information is available in the JUAC warning at <http://juac.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2015/06/Joint-Union-Advice-on-Warm-Air-Heating-Systems-April-2013.pdf>.

ACTION POINTS



- Check if your school has air cabinet heaters
- Check that your employer uses qualified asbestos consultants to inspect and carry out any works to the heaters
- Contact your trade union if you have any concerns

Asbestos in Crayons

Research carried out in the USA found the presence of asbestos fibres in crayons imported from China. Because the products are available to purchase online, it is possible they could be purchased in the UK and be taken into schools. The full list of contaminated products is available at: <http://www.asbestosnation.org/facts/tests-find-asbestos-in-kids-crayons-crime-scene-kits/>. Employers should be aware of the potential for asbestos to find its way into schools via contaminated items, and ensure they are aware of the provenance of products they procure.

Further Information

The TUC has produced a guide for safety reps titled *'Asbestos – Time to get rid of it!'* which is available at <https://www.tuc.org.uk/workplace-issues/health-and-safety/asbestos/asbestos-eradication-campaign/asbestos-%E2%80%93-time-get-rid-it>.

If you'd like to find out more information please contact your union.

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