

The Council is frequently contacted by householders requiring advice on the presence of asbestos materials in their homes. Building materials containing asbestos were widely used until the 1980's. If your property is more than 20 years old it is possible that it may contain asbestos containing materials.

The purpose of this guidance note is to provide general advice to residents on asbestos in the home.

What's covered?

- What is asbestos?
- When is asbestos a problem?
- Where is asbestos found in the home?
- What should I do if I have asbestos in the home?
- Who can remove asbestos?
- Asbestos notification for work carried out in the Borough of Brent
- How can I remove asbestos cement sheeting safely?
- How can asbestos waste be disposed of?
- What if you need to transport asbestos waste yourself?
- Advice and Further information



What is asbestos?

Asbestos is a natural mineral made up of many small fibres. There are three main types of asbestos, blue (crocidolite), brown (amosite) and white (chrysotile). The blue and brown types are known to be more hazardous than white, however all asbestos can be harmful if dust containing the fibres is breathed in. The asbestos fibres are long and thin and if inhaled can become lodged in the tissue of the lungs. Asbestos was widely used about the home in building materials and consumer goods. It was particularly used to resist heat and for fire protection.

When is asbestos a problem?

Asbestos in good condition in houses is not in itself dangerous but breathing asbestos dust is dangerous. It can cause a number of diseases including cancer. However asbestos is only dangerous when fibres are released. Even minor damage can produce many fibres e.g. drilling a hole to hang a picture. Damage can also be done by wall scrapers or rubbing down asbestos panels or artex with sandpaper. Cutting asbestos with electrical tools and smashing asbestos products with a hammer are extremely dangerous and must be avoided at all costs.

Where is asbestos found in the home?

- There can be a wide variety of products in the home that contain asbestos:-
- Asbestos cement - flat or corrugated sheets can be found on garage roofs, shed walls and roofs; molded asbestos cement is used for cold water tanks, external guttering and pipes, decking and roof tiles, lining under eaves and flue pipes.
- Asbestos insulating board - used for fire protection, heating insulation, ceiling tiles and as a building board. All insulation board made in the UK is now asbestos-free.
- Other building materials - Some plastic floor tiles, cushion flooring, roofing felts, textured plasters such as artex and paints contain asbestos.
- Warm air heating systems - Asbestos insulation was used in some systems and for lining cupboards housing the heating unit.
- Asbestos lagging - Used for insulation pipes and boilers. It is unlikely to be found in modern houses, but was sometimes used in flats or older houses. A preliminary inspection for asbestos should be made before repair or removal of older central heating systems.
- Domestic equipment - Asbestos was used in some oven gloves and fire blankets. Ovens, ironing boards and heaters may have asbestos components.
- Sprayed asbestos - used for protecting structural steelwork and for insulation. It may be found in a small number of steel framed houses built before the mid 1970's.

What should I do if I have asbestos in the home?

- Don't panic! If the asbestos is in good condition then it poses minimal risk and the best course of action is to leave it in place. Asbestos is usually only a problem if it's disturbed.
- Do seek professional advice if you think you've got a problem with asbestos in your home.
- Do treat asbestos with respect. Never drill, saw or disturb materials that contain asbestos.

You can paint asbestos materials to prevent any dust escaping. Emulsion paint can be used for insulating board but you should use an alkali-resistant primer or coating for asbestos cement products. Do not rub down asbestos material before painting.

If you are aware that you have asbestos in the home and are planning home improvements or maintenance you must inform builders and other contractors before they start work. If the asbestos is in poor condition i.e. surface is damaged, then you need to decide whether to seal, enclose or remove it.

It is often not possible to identify asbestos by visual examination alone. If asbestos-containing materials are suspected you must either presume they contain asbestos and adopt the necessary precautions. Alternatively to identify the type of asbestos you should arrange for the materials to be sampled by an asbestos specialist. In this regard you are advised to contact the Health & Safety Executive (HSE) (contact details are given in the next section) who maintain a register of asbestos licence holders.

Who can remove asbestos?

If you have asbestos that has been sprayed, asbestos lagging or insulation board in the home, it must ONLY be removed by a licensed asbestos contractor. Builders and plumbers carrying out alterations should not remove asbestos unless they are licensed to do so. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) maintain a register of companies that are licensed to remove asbestos. Please refer to the HSE website guidance <http://www.hse.gov.uk/asbestos/information.htm>. The HSE may be contacted by telephone on 0845 345 0055.

Asbestos cement (e.g. corrugated shed roof or garages) can, however, be removed by unlicensed persons. See Section on "**How can I remove asbestos cement sheeting safely?**"

Asbestos notification for work carried out in the Borough of Brent

Contractors wishing to remove asbestos must by law, notify the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), using the new online ASB5 Notification of Asbestos Work form. Where a licensed contractor intends to undertake asbestos remediation or removal works in workplaces such as offices, shops, warehouses and service industries, then the contractor must notify The HSE of the works at least 14 days before they commence.

Asbestos Notification Forms (ASB5) can be accessed from the HSE website, and completed online at <https://extranet.hse.gov.uk/lfserver/external/asb5>.

For other workplaces, the contractor should notify the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). Please refer to the HSE website guidance <http://www.hse.gov.uk/asbestos/information.htm>.

How can I remove asbestos cement sheeting safely?

Asbestos cement sheeting can be safely removed by remembering these basic rules:-

- Prepare the work area - remove any unnecessary items, cover the floor and surfaces with disposable polythene sheeting.
- Wear protective clothing - disposable overall with hood, disposable paper face mask (for use with asbestos) and rubber disposable gloves.
- Damp down - use a plant sprayer or hosepipe but don't soak the area as this will make cleaning up more difficult.
- Remove the asbestos without breaking it up, wrap in polythene sheeting or bags and seal with tape.
- Visually inspect the area and clear up any debris by hand - wipe down with disposable damp cloths.
- Never use a vacuum cleaner as this will just spread dust around.
- Pick up polythene sheeting and remove protective clothing and dispose of both as asbestos waste.
- Wash hands and face after the job is completed.

How an asbestos waste be disposed?

It is important that asbestos waste must not be placed in the dustbin as refuse vehicles generally grind collected waste and fibres could be released into the air.

However, the City of London Corporation's Hazardous Substance Unit offer a free service on behalf of London Boroughs whereby they will collect seven half filled builders rubble bags or 15 square metres of bonded asbestos sheets (individually wrapped and sealed) from your premises. Further amounts will be collected but a payment will be due. For more details of their hazardous waste collection service and to arrange a collection, please ring (020) 7332 3433. You will be asked to give a few details including:

- Which London Borough you are calling from
- How much asbestos waste you would like collected

If you need to transport asbestos waste yourself

If as a house holder, you intend to transport asbestos cement waste in your own vehicle, you do not need to be a registered waste carrier provided that it is your own waste. However, you should take the following steps to ensure that asbestos does not contaminate your car.

- Spray sheet of asbestos cement with water.
- Double wrap or double bag the asbestos cement with heavy duty polythene.
- Ensure the wrapping is secured with tape.
- Make sure vehicle occupants do not have access to the asbestos waste.