

Asbestos Awareness

What to do when you find it · asbestos remains the single biggest cause of work-related death

Asbestos was used extensively in buildings until it was banned outright in the UK in 1999. Any building built or refurbished before 2000 may contain it. It kills more workers than anything else, decades after the exposure, and construction trades are the most affected group.

Scope and limitations — read before use

IMPORTANT — SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS. This document is a template and guidance product. It is a starting point, not a finished assessment. Every workplace is different, and only the employer knows their own site, vehicles, people and tasks. The legal duties under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, the Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998, the Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992 and all other relevant law remain with the employer at all times and cannot be transferred to PHW Services or to any document. You must read, adapt and complete this material for your own site, satisfy yourself that it is suitable and sufficient, and seek competent advice where you are unsure. PHW Services does not warrant that using this pack will prevent an accident, prevent enforcement action, or achieve compliance in any particular case. Nothing in this pack is approved or endorsed by the Health and Safety Executive.

Contains public sector information published by the Health and Safety Executive and licensed under the Open Government Licence v3.0. This pack is not an HSE publication, is not approved or endorsed by HSE, and does not reproduce the HSE logo. Always refer to the current HSE guidance and legislation at hse.gov.uk, which may have changed since this pack was written.

1. This document is awareness only

Asbestos awareness training tells you how to recognise asbestos and avoid disturbing it. It does NOT qualify anybody to work with asbestos. Work with asbestos requires specific training, and higher-risk work requires a licensed contractor. Nothing in this pack authorises anyone to remove, drill, cut or disturb asbestos.

2. Where it is typically found

Material	Typical locations	Risk if disturbed
Sprayed coatings and lagging	Structural steel, pipework, boilers	Very high — licensed work
Asbestos insulating board (AIB)	Ceiling tiles, partitions, soffits, panels around boilers, fire doors	High — usually licensed work
Asbestos cement	Roof and wall sheets, gutters, downpipes, water tanks, flue pipes	Lower, but still dangerous if cut, drilled or broken
Textured coatings (Artex type)	Ceilings and walls	Lower, but must not be sanded or scraped dry
Floor tiles and bitumen products	Vinyl tiles, adhesives, damp proof course	Lower, but released if broken up
Rope, gaskets and paper	Boiler seals, pipe gaskets, electrical insulation	Variable
Loose fill	Cavity walls and lofts	Very high — licensed work

3. What to do if you find or suspect asbestos

1. STOP work immediately. Do not touch it further.
2. Stop anybody else entering the area.
3. Do not sweep, vacuum with an ordinary vacuum, or try to clean it up.

4. Leave any contaminated clothing at the site of the incident — do not take it home. Taking fibres home has killed family members.
5. Report it to the site manager and the client immediately.
6. The duty holder must produce the asbestos register or arrange a survey.
7. Do not resume until you have written confirmation the material is not asbestos, or it has been dealt with properly.
8. Record the incident, including who was present and for how long, because it may matter to them in thirty years.

4. The duty to manage

Under the Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012 the person responsible for maintenance of non-domestic premises has a duty to manage asbestos: find out whether it is present, assess its condition, keep a written register and management plan, and provide the information to anybody liable to disturb it.

As a contractor, you should ASK FOR THE ASBESTOS REGISTER BEFORE YOU START WORK on any pre-2000 building. If the client cannot produce one, that is a reason to stop and query, not a reason to carry on and hope.

5. Pre-start asbestos check

Question	Answer	Evidence seen
Was the building built or refurbished before 2000?		
Has an asbestos register been provided?		
Has a refurbishment or demolition survey been done for this work?		
Does the work involve disturbing the fabric of the building?		
Have all operatives had asbestos awareness training, and is it in date?		
Has the emergency procedure been briefed?		
Is it clear who to contact if something suspect is found?		

6. Asbestos awareness training record

Name	Role	Training provider	Date	Refresher due

CONSTRUCTION SITE SAFETY

Asbestos awareness should be refreshed regularly — annually is the common industry expectation where work may disturb asbestos.

Assessed by	Signature	Date	Review date