

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH INFORMATION

ASBESTOS IN THE HOME

Asbestos has been used in building materials and consumer goods for many years, particularly to resist heat and for fire protection. Asbestos is a natural, fibrous material; there are three main types, blue, brown and white. Diseases from asbestos are mainly of an industrial nature. Some asbestos are easily damaged and allow fibres to be released into the air, which can be harmful.

General Use

In some homes, particularly those built between 1945 and 1960, asbestos products may be present in asbestos cement products, as flat or corrugated sheets for walls or roofs of sheds and garages, for cold water tanks, down pipes, guttering and flue pipes. Asbestos may also be found in insulating board used for fire protection, heat insulation, building board and ceiling tiles or as pipe lagging or in plastic floor tiles, roofing felts and in some warm air heating systems. Some domestic equipment also contains asbestos, eg ironing board pads, oven gloves, fire blankets etc.

If you have any asbestos in your home, the following advice should be of assistance.

Undamaged Asbestos

If the asbestos produce is sound and not likely to become worn or damaged, it should not be disturbed.

Sealing

The choice of sealing systems depends on the nature of the asbestos material and the degree of damage. Rigid asbestos materials may be sealed with paint to prevent any dust escaping. Remove surface dust if necessary with a damp cloth, which should be disposed of in a sealed plastic bag while still damp. Seal cracks with filler before painting. Insulation board should be painted as follows:-

- (i) Undercoat and one or more top coats of vinyl gloss paint, or
- (ii) Two coats of vinyl gloss paint, or
- (iii) One coat of diluted polyvinyl acetated emulsion followed by a full strength coat (eg vinyl gloss and matt emulsion).

Asbestos cement is an alkaline resistant primer followed by one or more oil-based topcoats should be used. Where a high degree of protection is required, a flexible polymeric or a bitumate covering can be used.

Removal

If asbestos materials are damaged or giving off dust, they should be removed. Large amounts of asbestos or where there is asbestos lagging or sprayed asbestos, should be removed by specialist contractors. Small amounts may be removed by taking the following precautions:-

- (i) Wear a dust mask approved for asbestos
- (ii) Wear an overall (disposable or one which is well washed afterwards)
- (iii) Keep other people away from the working area
- (iv) Spread a sheet of plastic under the work area to collect dust
- (v) Wet the material well (provided there is no contact with electricity)
- (vi) Avoid using power tools wherever possible
- (vii) Remove whole sheets or components. Do not break them up, and place loose or small items in strong plastic bags and seal
- (viii) Clean up all dust with a damp cloth, then seal in a plastic bag whilst damp. Do not use a domestic vacuum cleaner, as dust may pass through the filter.
- (ix) Wash well afterwards

Domestic items such as oven gloves, simmering pads, should be disposed of in a sealed plastic bag as soon as they start showing signs of wear. Once removed, substitute with non-asbestos materials wherever possible.

Disposal of Waste

Small items and quantities of dust or loose asbestos materials should be sealed in strong plastic bags and marked 'Asbestos'. Large asbestos cement sheets should not be broken up and need not be bagged.

Domestic asbestos waste can be taken to Surrey County Council Waste Site, Charlton Lane, Sunbury. 01932 782792

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