



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

CONTACT US

If you have questions or concerns
about asbestos in your property,
contact Housing Services on:

0118 974 6000

or email us on:

HousingRepairs@wokingham.gov.uk

Asbestos in the home

Information handbook

An overview of the risks of asbestos in
the home and how to deal with it safely.



Asbestos in the home

This leaflet addresses concerns and questions about asbestos in homes. It explains what it is, where it is found, why it might be a problem and how to deal with it.

Crysotile - white asbestos during analysis

Asbestos is not dangerous if it is in good condition and left alone.

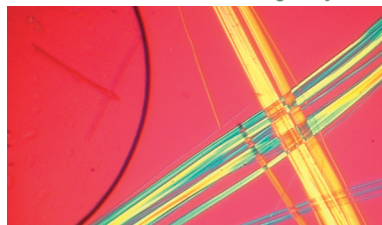
What is asbestos?

Asbestos is a naturally occurring fibrous mineral which is found in many countries throughout the world. There are a number of different types of asbestos, however the commonly occurring ones are white (crysotile), brown (amosite) and blue (crocidolite).

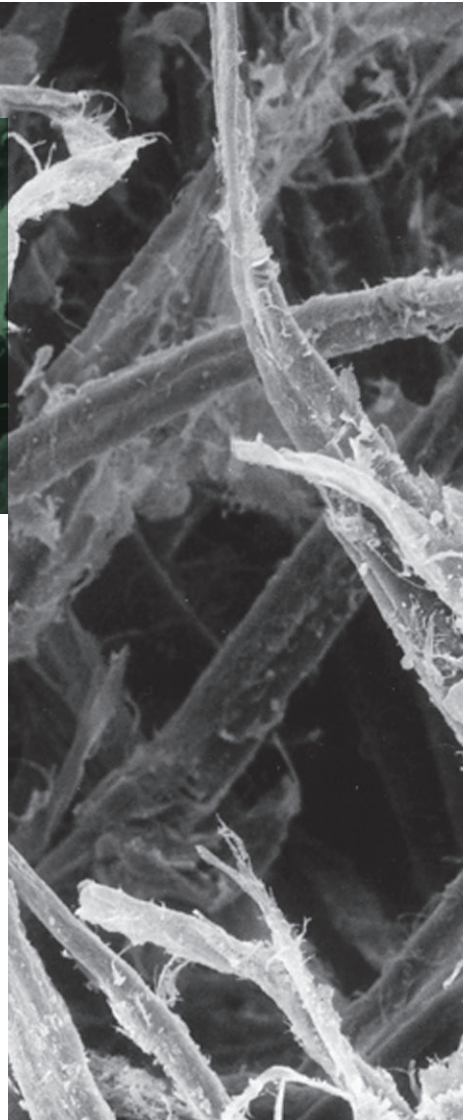
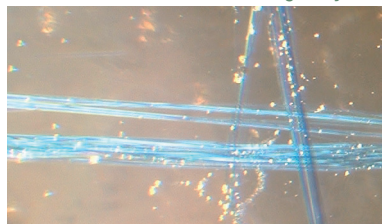
Asbestos fibres are very strong and resistant to heat and chemicals. This has led to their use in a wide range of building materials. It has been estimated that asbestos was used in more than 3000 commercial products.

Although properties built after 1990 are much less likely to contain asbestos, it was only banned in all its forms in 1999.

Amosite - brown asbestos during analysis



Crocidolite - blue asbestos during analysis



Why asbestos may be a problem?

When asbestos materials age or become damaged they can release fibres into the air. These can be breathed into the lungs where they may stay for a long time, causing possible damage. When very high levels of these fibres are breathed in there is a risk of lung diseases, including cancer.

People who have worked with asbestos for many years as part of their job or have washed the dusty clothing of those who worked with asbestos are most likely to be affected. The people most at risk from asbestos are those who could come across it during their work and disturb it, such as carpenters, electricians and other tradespeople doing repair and maintenance tasks in older buildings. Over the course of their working lives, such people may be accidentally exposed to asbestos a number of times, increasing their risk of developing health problems. Workplace regulations now protect such people.

Is everyone exposed to asbestos?

There is a very low level of fibres in the air everywhere because asbestos has been used widely and is a naturally occurring material. Exposure to this low level of fibres is unlikely to harm people's health.

Levels of fibres may be higher in buildings containing asbestos materials, especially where the materials are damaged. It is very unlikely that the levels of asbestos fibres found in buildings will be harmful, but if you have damaged asbestos materials in your home you should seek advice on appropriate action to take.

High, short term exposures to asbestos fibres can occur during DIY work. For this reason, try not to raise dust when working with materials which might contain asbestos, and avoid sanding or drilling.

The types of asbestos materials that may be found in homes are described below.

Insulating board



Asbestos content 20-45%

Insulating board has been used for fire protection, heat and sound insulation. It is particularly common in 1960s to early 1970s system-built housing and is found in materials such as ducts, infill panels, ceiling tiles, wall lining and bath panels in particular. It is unlikely to be found in buildings constructed after 1985.

Lagging



Asbestos content 55-100%

Asbestos lagging has been used for thermal insulation of pipes and boilers. It was widely used in public buildings and system-built flats during the 1960s to early 1970s in areas such as boiler houses and heating plants. Asbestos lagging is very rarely found in homes, especially those constructed after the mid 1970s. The use of asbestos for thermal insulation was banned in 1985.

Sprayed coating



Asbestos content up to 85%

Sprayed asbestos coatings were used for fire protection of structural steel and are commonly found in system-built flats built during the 1960s. The coatings were mainly applied around the core of the building such as service ducts, lift shafts, etc. Use stopped in 1974 and the spraying of asbestos has been prohibited since 1985. Sprayed asbestos has since been removed from many buildings, or sealed to prevent fibres being released.

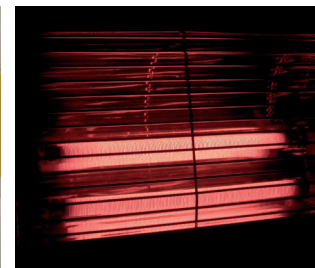
Other building materials



Asbestos content varied

Asbestos has been used in a variety of other building materials, for example, in decorative coatings such as textured paints and plasters. These were widely used but supply and application has been prohibited since 1992. Plastic floor tiles, roofing felts, tapes, ropes, felts and blankets may also contain asbestos.

Heating appliances/ domestic equipment



Asbestos content varied

Asbestos was used in some warm air heating systems, electric storage heaters (up to 1976) and in flameless catalytic gas heaters (up to 1988) and some early 'coal effect' gas fires. It has also been used in domestic equipment, such as oven gloves and ironing boards, seals on cooker doors and fire blankets. Asbestos has also been used in brake linings and pads.

Asbestos-cement products



Asbestos content mainly 10-15%

Asbestos-cement is the most widely used asbestos material. It is found in many types of building as profiled sheets for roofing and wall-cladding, in flat sheets and partition boards for linings to walls and ceilings, in bath panels, soffits boards, fire surrounds, flue pipes, cold water tanks and as roofing tiles and slates.

It has been commonly used as roofing and cladding for garages and sheds and also on guttering and drain pipes. Use has declined since 1976, but asbestos-cement was only finally banned in 1999.

Asbestos-cement products are unlikely to release high levels of fibres because of the way that they are made, unless they are subject to extreme abrasion such as sanding or drilling.

Damage from weathering may also release a small amount of fibres.

Where is asbestos found?

Wokingham Borough Council is in the process of updating its Asbestos Register. This will enable it to accurately record the location of asbestos found or presumed. Where the presence of asbestos is known or suspected, tests are carried out and the asbestos removed or made safe. Building materials containing asbestos were widely used from

1930, particularly from the 1960's onwards. So, houses and flats built or refurbished at this time may contain asbestos materials. Asbestos has also been used in some heat-resistant household products, such as oven gloves and ironing boards. The use of asbestos in these products decreased greatly around the mid-1980s.

REMEMBER...

- » It is not always easy to tell whether a product contains asbestos as modern asbestos-free materials often look similar – remember it is usually older products that contain asbestos
- » Loft or cavity insulation very rarely contains asbestos

Asbestos can also be found in floor tiles and water tank insulation.



Advice if asbestos materials are suspected

If you are in any doubt about whether your home may contain asbestos products, **SEEK ADVICE** from Wokingham Borough Council and follow these guidance notes:

What should I do if I suspect there is asbestos in my home?

Asbestos materials in good condition that cannot be readily damaged are often best left where they are because removal can lead to higher levels of fibres in the air for some time. Check the condition of asbestos materials from time to time to make sure they have not become damaged or started to deteriorate. If you are planning home improvements or maintenance and have asbestos in your home, you must contact WBC for advice before-hand.

Asbestos materials that are slightly damaged can sometimes be repaired by sealing or enclosing the material – **SEEK ADVICE** from Wokingham Borough Council on the most appropriate action.

Asbestos materials that are badly damaged or deteriorating can release dust and should be removed. Some asbestos materials (sprayed asbestos, lagging or insulating boards) must always be removed by contractors with a special licence issued by the governments Health & Safety Executive. These licensed contractors have to follow regulations to ensure asbestos is safely removed.



For further information on asbestos safety please see the following further information sources www.hse.gov.uk/asbestos and www.beware-asbestos.info.

Sometimes it is dangerous to have asbestos materials removed – for instance fire-protection materials – without replacing them with a suitable alternative.

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Take care when doing DIY

If you have, or suspect, asbestos containing materials in your home, contact Wokingham Borough Council before carrying out any DIY work. You may be able to carry out some work on lower-hazard materials such as floor tiles, bitumen sink pads and textured coating safely, assuming that you work in a safe matter including:

REMEMBER!

- » Avoid creating asbestos dust
- » Avoid breathing asbestos dust
- » Asbestos material in good condition should be left alone
- » Avoid working on any material containing asbestos. **NEVER** work on the more dangerous asbestos materials such as lagging, sprayed coatings and insulating board
- » If you think you may have asbestos-containing products in your house, **SEEK ADVICE** from Wokingham Borough Council before you take any action

1. Keep other people away from the area of work
2. Wear protective clothing (e.g. overalls) and avoid breathing in asbestos dust (a disposable CE marked FFP3 dust mask is recommended)
3. Keep asbestos materials wet to avoid producing dust
4. Work outside if possible and avoid working overhead
5. Use hand tools rather than power tools
6. Carefully wrap and double-bag the material in strong polythene sacks which are labelled with the symbol for asbestos
7. Contact Wokingham Borough Council for advice on how to dispose of asbestos. Remember that this is classed as 'hazardous waste' and cannot be disposed of along with normal building waste

Avoid...! disturbing any materials which could contain asbestos. Remember that cutting, drilling or sanding asbestos can release very high levels of dust.

For further information on asbestos safety please see the following further information sources www.hse.gov.uk/asbestos and www.beware-asbestos.info.

