

Frequently Asked Questions About Asbestos

What is Asbestos?

Asbestos is a naturally occurring mineral fibre that takes millions of years to form. It was widely used in the UK construction industry between the 1950s and 1990s (properties built prior to these dates may have had it added at a later date during refurbishment). It was routinely added to products such as cement, thermo plastics, insulation products and insulating board, so most houses and commercial properties built during this period are highly likely to contain some asbestos within the structure.

Asbestos was used because it was relatively low-cost and had many beneficial properties. It:

- does not burn until 1000 degrees centigrade
- does not conduct heat
- is not affected by chemicals or electricity
- has a very high tensile strength
- can be flexible

Materials containing asbestos are generally safe if they are in good condition. However, if they are damaged or broken, they can release fibres and dust into the air. These fibres can damage the lungs and lead to serious diseases such as lung cancer and mesothelioma.

How do I identify asbestos? What does asbestos look like?

With so many products having been produced and so many non-asbestos products that may look similar, it can be very difficult for the untrained eye to identify asbestos products. Core's surveyors have an expert knowledge of the uses of asbestos and the types of products it may be contained within, but even then, samples are taken in order to confirm if asbestos is present and identify the exact type of asbestos.

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Why was it used if it's so dangerous?

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Where can it be found?

Asbestos was used in over 3000 products and materials - you'd be surprised what everyday items it can turn up in. Here are some examples:

- Asbestos cement products include garage roofs, sheds, guttering, down-pipes, wall panels, bath panels, flue pipes, water tanks, patio tiles, roofing tiles and soffit boards.
- Asbestos insulating board has been used for things like fire protection panels on cupboards and doors, ceiling tiles, partition walls and soffit boards.
- Asbestos lagging was used to insulate pipes and boilers. However, it is less common in homes, especially those built after the mid-1970s, but we still come across it fairly frequently in commercial premises.
- Asbestos sprayed coatings were used to protect structural steel from fire, amongst other uses.
- Other asbestos products include some decorative coatings (most commonly known as Artex), plastic floor tiles, paper-backed floor lino and even toilet cisterns.



What do I do if I think my property may have asbestos?

Leave the affected areas alone and contact us. We can give you further advice and we'll only recommend a survey if it is necessary. Avoid sanding, sawing, drilling or disturbing these materials. Do not attempt to remove asbestos of any kind without seeking professional advice. Many products can only be removed by a licensed asbestos removal contractor.

What type of survey do I need?

There are three types of asbestos survey, as set out in HSG264 'Asbestos: The Survey Guide', which replaced MDHS100 in January 2010. These are 'management surveys' and 'refurbishment or demolition surveys'.

Management asbestos surveys help you comply with the law. They identify asbestos in all accessible areas, provide risk assessments on all asbestos-containing materials and make recommendations where problems are identified.

Refurbishment or demolition asbestos surveys are much more intrusive and use destructive methods in order to access areas that would normally be classed as inaccessible within a management survey. You would only require this type of survey if you were carrying out major refurbishment or demolition. The aim of these surveys is to locate all asbestos within all areas of the building so that the correct measures can be taken prior to refurbishment or demolition.

Can I deal with asbestos myself?

Prior to carrying out any works involving asbestos, it is essential you talk to an expert. We don't charge for advice over the phone and a simple conversation in most cases can ascertain whether or not you are permitted to deal with the type of asbestos you have, or whether you would be breaking the law if you did so.

If Core finds asbestos in my property, what happens next?

If we detect that there is a problem, we can arrange for the damage to be repaired or for the asbestos to be removed and disposed of safely. We will keep you fully informed and give you a number of possible options. Core always aims to provide practical, financially viable solutions and offers a full project management facility.

If there is asbestos and it's not damaged, does it have to be removed?

No. Generally it is better to leave asbestos-containing materials in place, especially if they are in good condition, so as to avoid unnecessary disturbance of asbestos fibres. In this situation, strategies to seal, encapsulate, repair, enclose and protect are preferred. A risk assessment will be carried out on all products, which will help in deciding the best course of action.

I've heard there are asbestos regulations. What are they and do they affect me?

Regulations were first introduced in 2002 and were the Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations (CAWR2002) but these were superseded in 2006 by the Control of Asbestos Regulations (CAR2006) and most recently the Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012 (CAR2012).

The most important points to note are Regulation 4 and Regulation 10. In summary, Regulation 4 places a duty to manage asbestos on the duty holder, this may be the owner of the property, landlord or the manager of the business within the premises. The regulation covers non-domestic premises and the communal areas within domestic dwellings - blocks of flats for instance. Note that it is a duty to manage, not a duty to survey. It just so happens that often you will need to have a survey carried out in order to be able to manage asbestos.

But the survey is only the first step to managing asbestos, by having a survey carried out and then allowing it to gather dust on the shelf you are not complying with the regulations.

Regulation 10 relates to training. Those most likely to be exposed to asbestos nowadays are people within the trades, electricians, plumbers, etc., those who may be disturbing asbestos on a regular basis, often without knowing they are doing so. By implementing training, trades people, contractors and staff are more likely to be able to identify possible asbestos materials and therefore ensure safe working practices. Training saves lives.

Also note that the Construction Design Management Regulations (CDM2007) may also require an asbestos survey to be carried out, specifically where major refurbishment or demolition is taking place.

If there is anything else you would like to know about asbestos, please visit our website, which contains a wealth of information about the types of asbestos and the products that contain them.

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