

Asbestos in schools

A guide for head teachers, governors and proprietors

Background

All British schools have a legal duty to protect their pupils and staff from potentially dangerous asbestos and by law you must have stringent processes in place within your school to carefully monitor asbestos.

Government legislation requires regular surveys to be carried out to assess the condition of your school buildings and report on any asbestos. Further action must be taken where asbestos is identified which has been damaged or disturbed, or is likely to be and cannot be protected. Asbestos containing materials are most likely to be disturbed or damaged when refurbishment or other building work is undertaken but small maintenance jobs, such as putting up shelving or cabling, and everyday wear and tear may also damage or disturb asbestos, releasing asbestos fibres into the air.

If the asbestos present in your school buildings is in good condition and unlikely to be disturbed then there is no obligation to remove it, but its location and condition must be recorded and monitored at regular intervals (usually at least annually). From this record, an assessment of the risk of exposure to an individual should be made and a management plan must be drawn up and reviewed at regular intervals. The management plan must be made available to all staff and the school must inform anybody who may disturb asbestos, such as contractors, as to where it is located.

Asbestos locations and uses

It is thought that around 75% of Britain's schools contain asbestos.

Asbestos was extensively used as a building material in the UK from the 1950s through to the mid-1980s. It was used for a variety of purposes and was ideal for fireproofing and insulation. Any school buildings built before 2000 can contain asbestos. Whilst the use of blue and brown asbestos was banned in 1985 some asbestos containing materials such as asbestos cement were still in use up to 1999.

Asbestos materials in good condition are safe unless asbestos fibres become airborne, which happens when materials are damaged.

Asbestos can be found in a wide range of common building materials such as:

- Loose fill insulation under floorboards and in roof spaces.
- Sprayed asbestos coatings used for thermal and acoustic insulation and as fire protection.
- Asbestos insulation commonly used around boilers or pipework.
- Asbestos insulating board (AIB) used as fireproofing and for thermal insulation.
- Everyday building items such as wall partitioning boards, ceiling tiles and general building board.
- Asbestos paper and textiles – rope seals, caulking to brickwork, jointing and packing.
- Asbestos cement products – roof and wall sheeting, cement flues used in boiler systems, air conditioning and ventilation systems.
- Textured coatings and floor tiles.

What is the duty to manage?

Regulation 4 of the Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012 places a requirement on dutyholders to undertake a suitable and sufficient assessment as to whether asbestos containing materials (ACMs) are likely to be present in any non-domestic premises under their control and then to manage the risk from these materials.

The 'duty to manage' requires duty holders to:

- Identify whether asbestos is present (or assume that it is).
- Assess its condition and record that information.
- Manage the risks to ensure that people are not exposed to asbestos fibres.
- Provide information about its location and condition to any person who might be liable to disturb it to prevent exposure. This is particularly relevant to contractors and others who undertake maintenance and refurbishment work or other work that disturbs the fabric of the building.

Dutyholder – Schools

The dutyholder is the person in control of construction, refurbishment and maintenance activities in the premises. In educational establishments the dutyholder will be the employer. This can vary with the type of school.

- In community schools, community special schools, voluntary controlled schools, maintained nursery schools and pupil referral units the employer is the Local Education Authority.
- In foundation schools, foundation special schools and voluntary aided schools, the employer is usually the governing body.
- In independent schools, the employer is usually the governing body, proprietor or trustees.

How do I make sure my school complies?

Delegate the task

The dutyholder can nominate someone to carry out all or part of the work required to comply with their duties. The nominated person or organisation must know what they have to do and should be competent to do the work.

1. Determine if ACMs are present

Initially the dutyholder should determine if there are likely to be any asbestos containing materials on the premises and if so where they are likely to be. This involves considering the age of the building, reviewing all documentary information (e.g. records for the building including architects plans/drawings and any previous surveys of the building) and carrying out a thorough inspection of the premises.

The inspection of the property will normally be in the form of an asbestos management survey which is often delegated to a third party with appropriate training and experience. The dutyholder has a responsibility to ensure that whoever is instructed to undertake the survey is competent to do so, has adequate expertise, knowledge and resources and has appropriate insurance cover for undertaking asbestos surveys. The HSE strongly recommends using accredited surveyors for undertaking asbestos surveys.

Guidance on asbestos surveying can be found in HSE publication HSG264 Asbestos: The Survey Guide which is aimed at surveyors carrying out asbestos surveys as well as those people who commission surveys e.g. dutyholders/clients.

If there is very strong evidence that no asbestos materials are present in the premises (e.g. the building was constructed without using ACMs) then no further action is required other than to record this evidence.

2. Assess the condition of ACMs

The condition of any ACMs should be assessed in order to determine the likelihood of fibres being released from an ACM by taking into consideration factors such as the type of material and its condition.

If an asbestos management survey has been carried out then this assessment will usually have been carried out by the surveyors in the form of a material assessment.

3. Assess the risk

The dutyholder should assess the potential risk from ACMs. This assessment should consider how likely it is that the ACM will be disturbed or damaged by taking into account factors such as: the information gathered from the material assessment, how much ACM there is, accessibility, nature of occupancy and activities which could lead to exposure e.g. maintenance.

4. Record the assessment information

A record should be created detailing the location of the known or presumed ACMs.

This record is often referred to as an asbestos register and is a simple document detailing the location of any ACMs along with details of their extent, condition, and product type. It should also give details of any areas which have not been accessed or inspected and which should be presumed to contain asbestos.

The asbestos register must be kept up-to-date and should be available on site for the entire life of the premises.

5. Make the management plan

A written management plan should be prepared which details how the risks from asbestos are going to be managed.

Typical information which should be documented within a management plan includes:

- Details of who will be responsible for managing the asbestos risk.
- A copy of the asbestos register or details of how to access it.
- Instructions that no work can be carried out on the fabric of the building without first checking the asbestos register. This should include arrangements for:
 - Ensuring that the register is checked in good time before any work starts
 - Ensuring that the presence of asbestos has been understood and taken into account
 - Ensuring that the correct control measures will be used and that trained contractors will carry out the work
- Details about any necessary work arising from the assessment e.g. repair or removal of ACMs.
- Arrangements for monitoring condition of ACMs.
- Details of how the management plan will be communicated.

In order to develop a management plan, a decision needs to be made as to what action needs to be taken for each ACM.

The basic options for management are:

- Leave the ACM in place and manage
- Protect/seal the ACM
- Repair/remove the ACM

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6. Action the management plan

The dutyholder should ensure that the management plan is implemented in order to manage the risks.

The plan should prioritise any actions and give high priority to damaged materials or those likely to be disturbed.

Procedures and responsibilities should be included within the plan in order to ensure that the asbestos register is shared within anyone carrying out maintenance or other work.

7. Review & update the management plan

The management plan should be thoroughly reviewed every 12 months or where there have been changes in circumstances (e.g. work undertaken, ACMs removed or repaired, changes in occupancy or use of the building).

The condition of any known or presumed ACMs should be checked periodically in order to ensure that they have not deteriorated or been damaged. The frequency of monitoring will depend upon the location of each ACM along with other factors which could affect its condition.

Periodic checks should be made to ensure that the arrangements and procedures for managing asbestos are effective and that people are aware of their responsibilities.

8. Communicate & share the management plan

The dutyholder should ensure that the plan is readily available and should:

- Inform employees what the arrangements are
- Provide information regarding the location of ACMs to the emergency services
- Provide employee representatives and trade union representatives with copies of the management plan

Further reading

Managing and working with asbestos L143 HSE Books 2013 ISBN 978 0 7176 6618 8

Managing asbestos in buildings: A brief guide INDG223 (rev5) HSE Books 2012 ISBN 978 0 7176 6487 0

Asbestos: The survey guide HSG264 HSE Books 2012 ISBN 978 0 7176 6502 0

For more information please contact our specialist asbestos team on 020 7960 3939 or visit our website: www.metro-safety.co.uk

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