

 West Lothian Council	Environmental Health		SUBJECT: Asbestos in homes
		Food Safety/Food Hygiene	NUMBER: PH05
UPDATED: November 2019		Health & Safety	
	✓	Public Health	
STATUS: PUBLIC ADVICE	✓	Pollution Control	
		Pest Control/Dog Warden	

Information Sheet PH05 Asbestos in homes

Many homes built up to 2000 may use materials which contain asbestos in certain areas. When it is found or needs to be disposed of, special care needs to be taken.

This advice sheet is for home owners. If you rent your home, the responsibility lies with the landlord. If you have a business your responsibilities may be different. Information on asbestos for businesses is available free of the Health and Safety Executive web site at <https://www.hse.gov.uk/asbestos/>

What is Asbestos?

Asbestos is a naturally occurring fibrous mineral. Asbestos has very fine fibres which are strong, and chemically and heat resistant. Asbestos is almost always incorporated into another material, e.g. cement.

Asbestos was used in building material in the UK up to 1999. Its use was banned in this country, with a full European ban in 2005, so any building built before 2000 could contain asbestos.

Common examples in homes are:

- Insulation Board – This has been used for fire protection, heat and sound insulation. Also used in soffit boards at the edge of roofs, boiler cupboard linings. (Up to 30%)
- Lagging – This has been used for the thermal insulation of pipes and boilers (This is very rarely found in homes).
- Sprayed Coating – This was used for fire protection of structural steel and condensation protection.
- Cement Products – This is the most commonly used asbestos material. It is found in different types of buildings as roofing sheets, wall cladding, partition boards, bath surrounds, roofing tiles and slates including corrugated sheeting, moulded products such as water tanks and flue pipes. (up to 16%)
- Textured coating – commonly known as “Artex” these typically used for ceiling and walls as condensation protection. (3-5% content)
- “Vinyl products – these are most commonly found in flooring materials. (2%)
- Heat resistant household items – ironing boards

This is a guide only and advises of the most common uses and locations of asbestos in housing. It is unlikely that homes will contain asbestos in all the locations noted above

Why can it be dangerous?

Asbestos materials present in housing do not generally put those living there at risk. When asbestos-containing materials are damaged or disturbed they can release fibres which, if breathed in, increase chances of getting asbestos related disease.

If you or your family smoke, the risk is increased many times.

What can be done about it?

Asbestos is only dangerous if disturbed and broken. This means that if it will not be disturbed or at risk of being broken, it is often best left where it is. Avoid carrying out any activities which may disturb the material such as drilling, scraping, sanding etc. Paint it over with a sticky (glossy) paint to bind the surface and mark it as possible asbestos to make sure no-one drills into it or breaks it in future.

If it needs to be removed, most can only be removed by a suitably qualified specialist contractor. If you choose to do it yourself, you may put yourself and your family at risk.

What can homeowners do, and where do they start?

If it can be removed in one piece, home owners can remove asbestos cement panels themselves. A water spray bottle should be available to hand to thoroughly wet any screw holes or cracks which develop during removal. Do not use a vacuum cleaner as it will only make loose fibres airborne, which increases the risk.

General advice for householders is available on the HSE web site at <http://www.hse.gov.uk/asbestos/faq.htm#asbestos-in-my-home>. For more specific information see the Asbestos Essentials web site (<http://www.hse.gov.uk/asbestos/essentials/index.htm>) for safe methods of removing asbestos containing materials. Sheets A11-A16 are particularly relevant to householders.

Other types of asbestos removal must only be carried out by specialist contractors. Accredited inspection contractors can be found at <http://www.ukas.com/about-accreditation/accredited-bodies/inspection-body-schedules.asp#abestos>

Council House tenants should refer to Section 7 of the Tenant handbook, "Being Safe in your Home".

Disposing of Asbestos

Because of the dangers from asbestos if it is disturbed or broken, there are strict laws on transporting and disposing of asbestos. A specialist contractor will be needed and unfortunately transport and disposal is not cheap. Licensed asbestos contractors can be found at <http://webcommunities.hse.gov.uk/connect.ti/asbestos.licensing/view?objectId=8516> or under 'asbestos contractors' in the phone book.

More Information

More information on asbestos can be found at:

- <http://www.hse.gov.uk/asbestos/>
- <https://www.blf.org.uk/Page/Asbestos-related-conditions>
- http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/HomeAndCommunity/Planning/DoingWorkYourself/DG_10022562