

Your guide to...

Asbestos

Home safety information for tenants.



Better homes, better lives

What is asbestos?

Asbestos is a material made up of strong fibres which are resistant to both heat and chemicals. These qualities made asbestos a popular material in the building trade and led to its use in a wide range of building products, including fireproofing. Asbestos is most likely to be found in homes built between the 1950s and early 1980s. Properties built since the mid 1980s are very unlikely to contain asbestos in the fabric of the building but may contain some traces in other areas. Properties built after 1990 are extremely unlikely to contain asbestos anywhere in the building. Asbestos has now been banned because it can be a danger to health.

Asbestos fibres can only be seen under a microscope. These fibres can penetrate deep into the lung and stay there. This can cause respiratory disease or some types of cancer.

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 contact your local housing organisation (LHO) immediately.

Where you might find asbestos products

Asbestos is found in a variety of products; some of the most common include:

- Floor tiles
- Wall boards
- Artex (textured) ceiling finishes
- Some plaster finishes and wall boards
- Sprayed coatings to pipe work
- Lagging around pipe work and hot water cylinders
- Water tanks
- Lining boards on the back of boilers or service cupboard doors
- Inside electrical distribution boards and fuses
- Bath panels
- Internal window cill boards
- Corrugated cement roofing sheets (often found on garages and outhouses)
- Artificial slate roofs
- Gutters and rainwater pipes.

Other common items from around the home, which may contain asbestos, are:

- Ironing board heating pads
- Lining panels on the back of gas fires

Asbestos may also be found in other products. This leaflet is only a guide to some of the most common types.

If the asbestos containing material is sealed (encapsulated) safely and is in good condition then it will not be a problem unless the sealant gets damaged. This is because asbestos is only dangerous when fibres can be released into the air.

Careful handling

If there are any asbestos products in your home it is important that you do not damage or disturb them in any way. If you carry out DIY on asbestos products you are putting yourself in danger. It is important that you:

- **Do not drill a hole through any asbestos boards**
- **Do not cut or break off any parts of asbestos products**
- **Do not rub down asbestos panels, or artex, with sandpaper**
- **Do not use wallpaper scrapers on asbestos products**
- **Do not remove asbestos panels to gain access to services**

Remember: cutting asbestos with electrical tools or breaking asbestos products with a hammer is extremely dangerous and must be avoided.

If you are not sure whether a product contains asbestos it is safest not to do anything that may damage or disturb it. In any case you should always contact GHA for permission to carry out alterations to your home. We will then be able to tell you whether there is any asbestos in your home when we visit.

What are we doing about asbestos?

- We have an asbestos manager and seven asbestos officers working to help you
- We have appointed Babcock Scientific Services as our accredited asbestos surveyors and they are carrying out a survey programme across all GHA properties
- Surveys will continue until all at-risk properties have been inspected. It is intended that initial surveys will be complete by April 2009
- We aim to ensure that all materials containing asbestos are effectively managed and risk to our tenants is reduced to its lowest practical level.

Once a survey has been carried out we will know whether there are any materials that contain asbestos in your home and, if so, what condition they are in. If any are in a dangerous condition we will arrange for them to be encapsulated or removed as soon as possible. However any materials, which are not in a dangerous condition, will not always be removed. This is because it is very disruptive and very costly. We will therefore endeavour to do any required work on asbestos when dwellings are empty or at the same time as when other major works are being carried out.

Please be aware that this leaflet is only a guide to some of the most common types and other everyday items may contain asbestos fibres.

Contact Us

If you have any concerns or questions about asbestos please contact your LHO. Your housing officer will be able to give you general advice.

If you do not know the contact details of your LHO please call 08459 001 001 or visit www.gha.org.uk

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