State Claims Agency

Accommodation Officers Information Booklet

Asbestos

The Asbestos Abatement Programme and the Asbestos Management Policy

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1. Introduction

Asbestos is the common name given to a group of naturally occurring minerals used in construction products, such as acoustic and thermal insulation, up until 1999.

Asbestos and asbestos containing materials (ACMs) may mostly be found in buildings built or refurbished before blue and brown asbestos was banned in 1985. However, some asbestos containing materials such as asbestos cement, which contains white asbestos, were used up until 1999.

Asbestos is a natural mineral made up of many small fibres and may pose a risk if the dust containing these fibres is released into the air and inhaled by individuals. In order for this to occur the material must be disturbed or damaged. For this reason, in certain cases it is sometimes a safer option, to leave the asbestos in-situ than to disturb the material. Some damaged asbestos can be made safe by repair and maintenance, which could involve either sealing or enclosing it to prevent further damage.

Where asbestos cannot be easily repaired and protected it should be removed by someone who is trained and competent to carry out the task.

2. Possible health hazards

The main risk associated with asbestos materials is the inhalation of asbestos fibres. The more easily crumbled (more friable) the material the more likely it is that the fibres will be released into the air. The way to protect people from this risk is to prevent the fibres becoming airborne.

There are a number of health effects that asbestos fibres can have. In most cases it is highly unlikely that these illnesses would affect the occupants of buildings where asbestos containing materials are found. Health effects from asbestos were more associated with individuals who were involved in its production or use during building.

Asbestosis

Asbestosis has virtually disappeared following the prohibition on the use of asbestos containing materials. It was associated with workers in industries that produced ACMs and that accumulated large numbers of asbestos fibres in the lung over a long period.

Cancer

Malignant mesothelioma of the pleura or peritoneum and ordinary lung cancer are associated with asbestos exposure. The majority of occurrences are associated with high-intensity long-term exposure.

Diffuse pleural thickening

This is an extremely uncommon condition and is the fastest disappearing asbestos complication in the industrialized world.

Pleural plaque.

This is a localized scar on the pleura and rarely has any clinical consequences. It is an indicator of the inhalation of significant amounts of asbestos fibres. It is important to note that the majority of individuals with plaque never develop other asbestos related diseases.

Respiratory experts are of the view that serious asbestos related disease only occurs in the event of high intensity long term exposure. Only in a small number of cases can the illnesses be attributed to relatively low dosages or low intensity exposures.

2.1 Can a single exposure cause an asbestos-related disease?

All exposure to asbestos should be avoided, however that does not mean that individuals should worry about a one-off exposure. From time to time accidental exposure to asbestos has occurred and has caused much concern and distress to the individuals concerned. The risk of developing an asbestos related disease depends on:

- the amount of asbestos fibres the individual is exposed to
- length of exposure
- frequency of exposures.

A one-off short-term exposure is unlikely to be of concern but each time a person is exposed the risk slightly increases.

Overall the likelihood of exposure to asbestos fibres is considered to be low. Where asbestos containing materials are not disturbed the likelihood is extremely low. However, given that the ill effects of exposure can take a number of years to manifest themselves and there is no accurate dose-response relationship established, a precautionary approach must be taken where asbestos containing materials are present in a building.

2.2 How can people be exposed to asbestos fibres?

The most likely way for ACMs to be disturbed or damaged is through maintenance and construction activities, even where the job is small, such as installing telephones, computers or any electrical equipment, shelving and CCTV. Anyone carrying out

such work will need to know that the building contains or may contain asbestos, where it is located and its condition. Maintenance workers have been identified as a particular group at risk due to the nature of their work.

Vandalism may also result in the release of asbestos fibres e.g. damage to asbestos panels caused by children kicking them. In order to reduce this risk, areas of potential damage should be protected.

ACMs, such as ceiling tiles, can also be damaged by pinning or tacking items to them.

3. Asbestos Abatement Programme.

There are duties on employers under both statute law (the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act) and common law to identify, assess and control workplace hazards.

As a result the Asbestos Abatement Programme and Asbestos Management Policy have been implemented for the buildings, which are occupied by State employees. This is managed by the Health and Safety Unit within the Office of Public Works

Under this programme, the following tasks were identified;

- Arrange asbestos surveying of all premises. There are approximately 5850 premises included in the programme.

- Prepare and implement action plans for the management of asbestos containing materials identified during the survey process.

- Address health and safety issues, including liaison with the Health and Safety Authority, staff and occupiers of the premises concerned.

4. What do you need to do?

4.1 The survey

In order to comply with statue and common law requirements, the employer must identify, assess and control workplace hazards. With respect to asbestos, this will require contracting a registered competent asbestos surveyor, appointed by the OPW, to carry out a standard sampling, identification and assessment survey. The survey must be completed in accordance with Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Exposure to Asbestos) Regulations 2006 and in accordance with the protocol set out in

'MDHS 100 Surveying, sampling, and assessment of asbestos-containing materials' published by the Health and Safety Executive, UK.

The purpose of the survey is to locate, as far as is reasonably practicable, the presence and extent of any suspect ACMs and assess their condition. Representative samples are collected and analysed for the presence of asbestos. The surveyor will also carry out air monitoring to show whether or not asbestos fibres are present in air.

The assessment evaluates the following factors;

- The type of asbestos involved
- The condition of the asbestos or ACMs
- The location of the material
- The use and occupancy features of the location
- The likelihood/frequency of ongoing maintenance activities in the area

When these factors have been evaluated a risk classification will be assigned to the affected area. This in turn determines the appropriate management strategy.

Where the management strategy indicates that the ACMs need to be removed, the accommodation officer via the OPW, should arrange for them to be removed as soon as possible.

Where the risk assessment indicates that the ACMs do not need to be removed, options for managing them include encapsulation (painting or sealing), enclosure, labelling and registration. The accommodation officer, through the OPW, should arrange for appropriate remedial works to take place based on the assessment survey.

4.2 Asbestos register

The accommodation officer should ensure that the initial register, detailing all ACMs in the premises, is provided by the competent asbestos surveyor appointed by the OPW. The upkeep of this register is the responsibility of the accommodation officers. The register essentially lists the areas where the asbestos containing materials have been found, when they were found, what condition it is in, what are the recommendations for management, eg avoid mechanical damage. If any actions have been taken such as painting, labelling etc these should also be noted.

An extract from a typical register is given in appendix 1.

The accommodation officer and register must be consulted every time that any maintenance or repair work is being carried out in the building. Appropriate precautions must be put in place if work is to be undertaken.

4.3 Warning labels

Warning labels should be attached to material in a position that gives adequate warning to prevent accidental damage.

4.4 Regular inspections

All areas containing asbestos containing materials should be inspected at least annually to ensure labels are still in position and that the material has not deteriorated.

4.5 Communicate with the building's occupants

It is a legal duty to communicate with the building's occupants throughout the asbestos management process, from risk assessment to inspection through to the decision making about the management of asbestos containing materials. Occupants should be made aware of the location of the ACMs if they are likely to disturb them. This is particularly important for maintenance workers who might directly disturb ACMs while working. A system for warning contractors must also be put in place to prevent them disturbing ACMs without taking proper precautions.

When communicating with occupants it is important to give a positive message about the management of ACMs and the control measures that are in place to reduce the risk of exposure and ill health.

Staff must be encouraged to report any damage to ACMs.

4.6 Safety Statement

If ACMs are found in the building a section must be inserted into the Safety Statement explaining the hazard, assessing the risk and stating what control measures are in place to reduce the risk. A suggested insertion is set out in appendix 2.

4.7 What do you do if you find suspected asbestos containing material before your building is surveyed?

If you suspect there is asbestos containing materials in your building the following action should be taken;

1. Avoid any action that would disturb the material
2. If a contractor is working at the site and their work is likely to disturb the asbestos containing material, they should be instructed to stop immediately.
3. Inform the Health and Safety Unit, OPW.
4. Complete the Asbestos Notification Form in appendix 3 and fax to the Health and Safety Unit.

5. Contact Details

The Health and Safety Unit can be contacted at
Health and Safety Unit,
Head Office,
51 St Stephens Green,
Dublin 2.

Phone: 01 6613111 extns 2390 & 2603
Fax: 01 6610747

Email: health.safety@opw.ie

Appendix 1 Sample Asbestos Register

Roll Number: 3215
Building: Red Block building
Date: 18th April 2005
Register compiled by: Asbestos Surveyor
Register updated by: Accommodation Officer

Room no/ identification	Asbestos located where (eg floor tile, ceiling)	Extent of asbestos m^2	Condition	When first found	Recommended action for managing asbestos (e.g. avoid mechanical damage)	Action taken (e.g. labelling, painting, sealing)
Workshop	Floor Vinyl floor tiles contain asbestos – non friable	$44m^2$	Good condition	17/03/04	Avoid mechanical damage and abrasion. Remove if refurbishment, structural alterations or demolition is to be carried out in this area. Check condition annually.	Warning labels affixed during 2004. Additional warning labels affixed March, 2005.
Storeroom	Floor Vinyl floor tiles contain asbestos – non friable	$8m^2$	Good condition	03/01/05	Avoid mechanical damage and abrasion. Remove if refurbishment, structural alterations or demolition is to be carried out in this area. Check condition annually.	Warning labels affixed January 2005.

Appendix 2 Suggested insert for Safety Statement

(amendments should be made to suit local conditions)

SUBJECT Asbestos

HAZARDS Exposure to asbestos fibre can cause a number of lung diseases including asbestosis and cancer.

RISK The main risk associated with asbestos materials is the inhalation of asbestos fibres. The more easily crumbled (more friable) the material the more likely it is that the fibres will get into the air. A serious risk may arise if an attempt is made to remove or interfere with this asbestos without first taking adequate precautions to ensure that staff and others are not exposed to air borne fibres.

The risk associated with the asbestos containing materials in this building is considered to be **low.**

CONTROLS

- The building has been surveyed by competent surveyors for the presence of asbestos containing materials.
- Air monitoring has been carried out to check for the presence of fibres.
- A risk assessment has been carried out.
- High risk materials have been removed.
- Low risk material has been labelled.
- In some cases the material has been encapsulated to reduce the risk even further.
- A register of the asbestos containing material has been compiled.
- The condition of asbestos containing material will be inspected on an annual basis.
- Building occupants are asked to report any damage to asbestos containing materials.

PERSON RESPONSIBLE **Accommodation Officer**

REFERENCE ***S.I NO. 386/2006 Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Exposure of Asbestos) Regulations***

Appendix 3 OFFICE OF PUBLIC WORKS-ASBESTOS NOTIFICATION FORM

(Parts A & B to be completed by Notifier)

A. General Details of Premises

Building Name: Use:

Address:

Notified by: Date:

Signature:

Telephone No: Fax No: E-Mail:

Year of Construction (if known):

B. Details of Asbestos Materials

Location:
(Basement, boiler house, office etc.)

Nature of the Asbestos:
(Lagging, ceiling tile, corrugated sheeting etc.)

Condition:
(Good, friable, loose, poor etc.)

C. Health and Safety Unit Notification Record

Date Received:

Summary of Action Taken:

Signature: Date: