



Solihull
Community Housing
Shaping our neighbourhoods

Asbestos in your home

Asbestos in your home

Many buildings in the UK contain asbestos. It is important to be aware of asbestos and what it is.

This leaflet explains:

- what asbestos is
- where you might find it
- why it may be a problem
- how to deal with it.

Asbestos was a very popular building material in homes for many years. It does not catch fire easily, is not easily damaged by chemicals and stands up to a lot of wear. It also blocks noise and insulates buildings, and strengthens a range of other materials.

Using asbestos in construction was not banned in the United Kingdom until 1999, which means that your home is likely to have some asbestos in it.

If there is asbestos in your home, this does not automatically mean there is a problem. In fact, materials containing asbestos are very good at what they do.

Asbestos fibres can only affect your health if they become damaged, either accidentally or while they are being worked on during building work or DIY. If this happens, the asbestos could release fibres and these could harm your health if you breathed in a large amount.

What is asbestos?

Asbestos is a natural mineral, which is dug out of the ground. It is made up of similar chemicals to talcum powder (they are all silicates). It has been used in buildings for about 150 years, and there are some records of it being used as early as Roman times.

Asbestos is contained in rock. The rock is

crushed and processed to allow the asbestos to be taken out. Most of the asbestos that has been used in this country has been imported, as there are not large amounts of asbestos in the UK.

There are six types of asbestos. The three main types are:

- **Crocidolite (blue asbestos)** – This is the most harmful type of asbestos.
- **Amosite (brown asbestos)** – This is less harmful than blue asbestos but more harmful than white asbestos.
- **Chrysotile (white asbestos)** – This is the least harmful type of asbestos

Blue asbestos is only very rarely found in council homes. There are small amounts of brown asbestos. The most common is white asbestos, which is also the softest and least harmful. In towns and cities, there are white asbestos fibres in the air, which means that we are all breathing in about 200,000 – 300,000 fibres every day without harming our health.

Materials containing asbestos cannot be identified simply by looking at them. To find out whether a material contains asbestos, you need to have a sample taken of the material and have it analysed by an accredited laboratory. Also, how dangerous the asbestos is depends on the type of asbestos and where it is in your home. We have carried out surveys in many homes and shared the information we found with our tenants.

Is there asbestos in my home?

Asbestos can be found in most homes built before the late 1990s. There may be asbestos in the following areas of your home.

- Boilers
- Flues
- Pipe joints
- Garage roofs
- Fire breaks
- Pipework
- Gas appliances
- Fire doors
- Textured coatings, like Artex
- Pipe boxing
- Insulation
- Water heaters
- Soffits
- Partition walls
- Bath panels
- Water tanks
- Storage heaters
- Fascias
- Ceiling tiles
- Floor tiles
- Door linings

Any new materials we or our contractors fit to your home will be free from asbestos.

Will asbestos affect my health?

Asbestos is not a danger to your health if it is in good condition and is not disturbed. For example, you can disturb asbestos by drilling or sawing into it. In our homes, most materials containing asbestos are in good condition and only contain low amounts.

If you breathe in asbestos dust, tiny fibres can reach your lungs. This can cause diseases like asbestosis or cancer. However, for this to happen you must have breathed in a large number of fibres and it does not happen overnight. How much the fibres affect your health also depends on the type of asbestos breathed in.

How can I reduce the risks?

- Don't repair or remove any material that you think may contain asbestos.
- Don't cut, break, saw, drill, sand or disturb anything you think may contain asbestos.
- If you don't know what a material is

made from, assume that it contains asbestos.

- If you don't know whether something contains asbestos, phone us on 0121 717 1515 and we will be able to check our register. If we haven't got a record, we can arrange to have the material inspected, have it analysed or carry out a risk assessment.

We have a management plan to make sure we take appropriate action to identify and deal with materials containing asbestos in your home. We are committed to keeping to the law on controlling asbestos, and we will not put your health and safety in danger by allowing you to come into contact with asbestos fibres that aren't controlled.

Will you remove asbestos from my home?

Asbestos was used so widely in the building trade for such a long time that removing asbestos from all homes isn't practical. Our policy is to do a risk assessment for every case we are told about.

A trained surveyor will decide whether to:

- leave the asbestos in place and make a record of where it is (if it is in good condition)
- seal the asbestos to stop it breaking down
- cover the asbestos with timber, PVC or other material
- remove it and replace it with a material that doesn't contain asbestos.

Private tenants

If you rent your home from a private landlord, you should contact your landlord if you have any concerns about asbestos.

If your landlord seems to ignore your concerns, you can phone the SCH Asbestos team on 0121 717 1515 for advice.

What if I own my home or I am a leaseholder?

If you own your home or you are a leaseholder, we aren't responsible for asbestos in your home. But if you contact us we can give you a list of contractors licensed to deal with asbestos.

If your home is in a building that we own the freehold of, and there is asbestos in a shared area of the building, we are responsible for dealing with it.

Who can remove asbestos?

Different contractors deal with different types of asbestos. The SCH Asbestos team are able to remove certain types of low risk asbestos products.

For higher risk products we use a contractor licensed by the Health and Safety Executive. We do spot checks to make sure the contractors work to high standards of health and safety.

We may charge you for removing asbestos, depending on the type of asbestos, what work is needed, and the type of tenancy you have. We will give you an estimate of the cost before the work starts.

If you don't know whether a product contains asbestos, you must assume it does. Do not disturb it and seek advice.

If you have any concerns about asbestos, please phone us on 0121 717 1515 or find out more information by visiting our website www.solihullcommunityhousing.org.uk



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