



# Asbestos in the home

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# Asbestos in the home

This leaflet addresses concerns and questions about asbestos in the home. It explains what asbestos is, where it can be found, why it may cause a problem and how to deal with it.

Left undisturbed, asbestos is not dangerous. Even if there is asbestos in your home, it is not usually a serious problem.

It is only dangerous when it deteriorates, gets damaged or is disturbed. When asbestos becomes unstable or is disturbed, the risk of asbestos fibres being released is greatly increased. If breathed in, these fibres can result in an asbestos related disease.

This leaflet is intended as a reference guide, although it does contain important safety information.

In this leaflet you will find information on:

- What is asbestos?
- Why may asbestos be a problem?
- Who is exposed to asbestos?
- Where is asbestos found?
- How to identify products or materials containing asbestos.
- What to do if you think there is asbestos in your home.
- DIY advice.
- How to dispose of asbestos.
- Asbestos and the law.

## What is asbestos?

Asbestos is a natural mineral (a fibrous silicate) found in rocks all over the world.

It has been used commercially for about 150 years because it is strong, flexible and stable and this means it's found in a wide range of building materials and products.

## Why might asbestos be a problem?

When asbestos materials age and become damaged they can release fibres into the air. These can be inhaled deep into the lungs where they may stay for a long time, causing possible damage. Asbestos fibres are strong and resistant to heat and chemicals. The greatest risks arise when asbestos is damaged, drilled, sawn, scrubbed or sanded. DIY work can result in brief, but high, levels of exposure.

**If you think a material might contain asbestos, do not work on it and seek expert advice.**



## Who is exposed to asbestos?

There are asbestos-containing materials in about 5.5 million buildings in the UK. This means there is a general low level of fibres in the air.

Exposure may be higher in buildings containing asbestos materials, especially where materials are damaged. If you have damaged asbestos material in your home, you should seek advice on the appropriate action to take. High, short-term exposure to asbestos can occur during DIY work. For this reason, try not to raise dust when working with materials which might contain asbestos and avoid sanding, drilling or scraping.

If you are unsure or have some concerns of what the material is made of, please contact us for further information.

## Where is asbestos found?

Building materials containing asbestos were widely used from 1950 to around 1999, particularly from the 1960s onwards. So houses and flats built or refurbished around this time may contain asbestos materials.

Asbestos has also been used in some heat-resistant household products, such as oven gloves and ironing boards. The use of asbestos in these products decreased around the mid-1980s and since 1993, the use of asbestos in most products has been banned.

- It's not always easy to tell whether a product contains asbestos, as modern asbestos-free materials often look similar. Remember, it is usually older products that contain asbestos.

The types of asbestos materials that may be found in some homes are described on the next page.

## How can you identify products or materials containing asbestos?

All Two Rivers Housing properties have been surveyed for asbestos. The results are held by Two Rivers Housing and are available on request.

Properties built after 2000 are not surveyed for asbestos.

Remember, products containing asbestos can look very similar to those not containing asbestos. **If in doubt SEEK ADVICE.**

### The Law

The law does not require asbestos to be removed when it is found unless it has become damaged, deteriorated or needs to be removed prior to works being undertaken.

Asbestos that is in good condition and left undisturbed will not pose any health risk.



## Types of asbestos materials

### Lagging (asbestos content 55–100%)

Asbestos lagging was used for thermal insulation of pipes and boilers. It was widely used in public buildings and system-built flats during the 1960s to early 1970s in areas such as boiler houses. Asbestos lagging is very rarely found in homes built after the mid 1970s. The use of asbestos thermal insulation was banned in 1986.

### Sprayed coating (asbestos content up to 85%)

Sprayed asbestos coatings were used for fire protection of structural steel and are commonly found in system-built flats built during the 1960s. The coatings were mainly applied around the core of the building such as service draughts and lift shafts. Use of these coatings stopped in 1974 and the spraying of asbestos has been prohibited since 1986. Sprayed asbestos has since been removed from many buildings, or sealed to prevent the fibres being released.

### Insulating board (asbestos content 20–45%)

Insulation board has been used for fire protection, heat and sound insulation. It was common in the 1960s and 1970s system-built housing, and is found in materials such as ducts, infill panels, ceiling tiles, wall lining, bath panels, soffits and partitions. It is unlikely to be found in buildings built after 1982.

## Asbestos cement products

(asbestos content mainly 10–15%, but sometimes up to 40%)

Asbestos cement is the most widely-used asbestos material. It is found in many types of building as profiled sheets of roofing and wall cladding, in flat sheets and partition boards for linings to walls and ceilings, bath panels, fire surrounds, flue pipes, cold water tanks and roofing tiles and slates.

It has been commonly used as roofing and cladding for garages and sheds and in guttering and drainpipes. Use has declined since 1976, but asbestos cement was used up until the late 1990s, particularly in roofing and cladding products.

Asbestos cement products are unlikely to release high levels of fibres because of the way it was made, unless they are subject to extreme abrasion. Damage from weathering may also release small amounts of fibre. Asbestos has been used in a variety of other building materials, for example, decorative coatings such as textured paint and plasters. Asbestos can also be found in plastic floor tiles, cushion flooring, roofing felt, tapes, ropes, felts and some blankets.

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## Heating appliances and domestic equipment

Asbestos was used in some warm air heating systems, electric storage heaters (up to 1976) and in the flameless catalytic gas heaters (up to 1988), as well as some early 'coal-effect' gas fires and as a rope seal behind an open fire.

It has been used in domestic equipment such as oven gloves, ironing boards, seals on cooker doors and fire blankets, as well as in vehicle brake linings and pads.

## What should you do if you suspect there is asbestos in your home?

Asbestos materials in good condition that cannot readily be damaged are often best left where they are as removal can lead to higher levels of fibres in the air.

Check the condition of asbestos materials from time to time to make sure they have not become damaged or started to deteriorate.

If you are planning home improvements or maintenance and have asbestos in your home, always inform builders, maintenance workers or contractors before they start work.

We hold a database of our properties containing asbestos products. This means we can work closely with our contractors and repairs team to make sure they can work safely at your home.

Asbestos materials that are slightly damaged can sometimes be repaired by sealing or enclosing the

material. **SEEK ADVICE** on the most appropriate action.

Badly damaged or deteriorating asbestos materials can release dust and should be removed by a specialist contractor who will follow specific safety regulations.

**Under NO circumstances attempt to carry out asbestos removal yourself.**

## How should I dispose of asbestos?

- Please contact us to arrange for disposal.
- Do not put asbestos waste in the dustbin.

### Take care when doing DIY

If you have asbestos materials in your home, extra care should be taken when doing DIY. **SEEK ADVICE.**

# REMEMBER

- Avoid disturbing or damaging asbestos materials in good condition.
- If you have damaged or deteriorating asbestos materials in your home then SEEK ADVICE.
- Do not keep oven gloves or other small items containing asbestos – dispose of them safely (see section ‘How should I dispose of asbestos?’).
- If you think your warm air heating system, electrical storage heating system or flameless gas heater may contain asbestos then SEEK ADVICE. If they do contain asbestos, do not attempt to dismantle these appliances yourself.
- Avoid creating asbestos dust.
- Avoid breathing in asbestos dust.
- Asbestos material, in good condition, should be left alone.

Please keep this document in a safe place as it contains important safety information.

If you need any further information or advice relating to asbestos in your home, please do contact us.

## Contact us

Telephone: **033 33 55 44 33**

Website: **[www.tworivershousing.org.uk](http://www.tworivershousing.org.uk)**

Email: **[customerservices@2rh.org.uk](mailto:customerservices@2rh.org.uk)**

If you would like this leaflet in large print or audio CD, please call us.



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