

# Asbestos Safety

## A householder's guide

**This fact sheet is designed to allay any fears and concerns you may have about the possible presence of asbestos within your home.**

If Wakefield and District Housing (WDH) allocate a property which it knows contains asbestos, we will ensure it is in a safe condition and not posing a risk to the occupiers. If a repair is undertaken to your home, that would require the disturbance of an asbestos product, then the work will be carried out by trained employees or licensed contractors to ensure your safety. WDH has its own asbestos policy. WDH tenants should not carry out any work, however small, to the property without first asking for written permission from their local Service Access Point (contact details are in your tenants handbook).

### **What is asbestos?**

Asbestos is a naturally occurring mineral. It is found in most homes in different forms. Asbestos products are only dangerous when they are damaged, worn or worked on with power tools. This is because they can release fibres into the air. Asbestos dust is made up of tiny fibres which, if inhaled, can be harmful to the lungs. The levels of exposure to which asbestos fibres cause ill health effects are not known. What we can be sure of is that the more asbestos fibres people are exposed to, the greater the risk.

### **Where might you find asbestos?**

Asbestos is used in many products found in and around the home. Asbestos was used for a specific purpose, either to provide heat resistance such as behind gas fires or to provide rigidity, as in asbestos cement garages.

### **Asbestos cement**

In and around the home, one of the most common uses of asbestos is in cement products. These have the appearance of a hard grey material produced either as sheets or mouldings. It is commonly found in the construction of garages, sheds, soffit boards, roof tiles, fire surrounds, drainpipes, flue pipes and some water systems.

## **Other building products**

Some roof felts, textured plaster – Artex, paints, floor tiles, bath panels, wall plugging compounds and specialist adhesives can contain asbestos.

## **Domestic equipment**

Asbestos is commonly used in oven door seals, ironing boards and oven gloves. It may also be found in fire blankets and electric heaters.

## **Artex and textured coatings**

The use of textured coatings was high throughout the 1970s and 1980s, so the possibility of your home having a textured coating as a decoration to the walls is very high. Some of these coatings contained small amounts of asbestos, between 3% and 5%. Asbestos is safe if not damaged, and coated with a sealant, that is painted. Asbestos fibres are only dangerous if they become air borne and are then breathed in. To ensure you and your family are not exposed to any asbestos materials you should follow the simple guidelines given.

- If the textured coating is in a sound condition, that is not damaged or flaking, then it should be left undisturbed.
- **Do not** sand, drill, break off or attempt any work on textured coatings, unless you have had written permission to do so, as this could release fibres into the air.
- If large areas of the textured coating are damaged or flaking due to property defects, then you should inform OneCALL 0845 8 507 507. (Calls may be recorded.)
- Any damage not caused by fair wear and tear to wall surfaces will be treated as a rechargeable repair.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) recommends that any asbestos containing materials should be left in place, especially if they are of sound quality, sealed by a coat of paint and not going to be disturbed by any maintenance type works. It is WDH's policy not to remove any textured coatings from its homes.

## **Identification**

Identification is not easy. You cannot tell if a particular product contains asbestos just by looking at it with the naked eye. It is also untrue that the colour of the material indicates the type of asbestos it contains.

## **IMPORTANT**

- Do not sand, drill or work on asbestos containing materials with power tools.
- Do not break up any asbestos containing materials.
- Do not attempt to remove any asbestos containing materials yourself.

**Remember - Asbestos fibres are only dangerous if they become air borne and are then breathed in.**

**Do not dispose of any asbestos products without getting advice.**

To dispose of small amounts of asbestos waste, you should first ensure it is thoroughly wet, this will stop any dust from being disturbed and getting into the air around you.

Small amounts mean things such as oven gloves and fire blankets. Remember, they must be placed in a sealed plastic bag and marked up as "asbestos". The only household waste site within the Wakefield district where you can dispose of any asbestos materials is Wakefield Transfer Loading Station, Denby Dale Road, Wakefield - phone: 01924 302348. You should phone the Transfer Loading Station giving them 24 hours notice and obtain the appropriate paperwork before taking the asbestos for disposal.

**Under no circumstances should you place asbestos materials in your dustbin or refuse chute.**

If you want to dispose of large asbestos cement sheets then you should **not** break them up. You should employ an approved contractor that holds a certificate for disposing of asbestos, they will wrap them in polythene sheeting and label the material accordingly. If you are in any doubt, ask us for advice. You can contact us through OneCALL at anytime on 0845 8 507 507.

**We are committed to providing equal access to information. If you would like this information in another language or format, please phone us on 0845 8 507 507.**