

# Asbestos Safety

## A householder's guide

**This fact sheet is 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 safe and that there is no risk to the occupiers. If a repair to your home would mean disturbing an asbestos product, 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 tenant handbook).

### **What is asbestos?**

Asbestos is a naturally occurring mineral; it is in most homes in many different forms. Asbestos products are only dangerous when damaged, worn or worked on with power tools. This is because they can release fibres into the air. Asbestos dust is made 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 unknown. What we can be sure of is the more asbestos fibres people are exposed to, the greater the risk.

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

Asbestos is in many products found in and around the home. Asbestos was used for specific purposes, 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 appear as a hard grey material produced either as sheets or mouldings. It is common 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 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 high. Some of these coatings contained small amounts of asbestos, between 3% and 5%. Asbestos is safe if it is not damaged and is coated with a sealant. Asbestos fibres are only dangerous if they become airborne and are breathed in. To ensure you and your family are not exposed to any asbestos materials you should follow these simple guidelines.

- If the textured coating is not damaged or flaking leave it alone.
- **Do not** sand, drill, break off or do 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, because of property defects, then you should tell OneCALL 0845 8 507 507. (Calls may be recorded for training purposes.)
- 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, 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 the colour of the material indicates the 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 try to remove any asbestos containing materials yourself.

**Remember - Asbestos fibres are only dangerous if they become airborne and breathed in.**

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

To dispose of small amounts of asbestos waste (small amounts mean items such as oven gloves and fire blankets,) you should first ensure it is thoroughly wet, this will stop any dust getting into the air around you.

It must be put in a sealed plastic bag and marked as 'asbestos'. The only household waste site in the Wakefield district you can dispose of any asbestos materials is Wakefield Transfer Loading Station, Denby Dale Road, Wakefield. You should phone the Transfer Loading Station on 01924 302348, giving them 24 hours notice, and get the correct 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 correctly label the material.

If you are in any doubt, ask us for advice. You can contact us through OneCALL on 0845 8 507 507.

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