



Department
for Education

Managing asbestos in your school

**Departmental advice for school leaders,
governors, local authorities and academy
trusts**

March 2015

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Summary

About this departmental advice

This is advice from the Department for Education. This advice is non-statutory, and has been produced to help readers understand their obligations and duties in relation to asbestos management in schools. This advice is intended to provide an accessible overview of asbestos management. It is intended to complement rather than replace more detailed or tailored technical or specialist advice which you may need in order to ensure asbestos is being managed properly in your school.

Expiry or review date

This advice will next be reviewed before March 2016.

Who is this advice for?

This advice is for school leaders, staff and governing bodies working in schools that contain asbestos.

Main points

Your school buildings may contain asbestos if any part of them was built before 2000. It is extremely important that any asbestos present in your school is managed properly. If you do not follow the steps set out in this advice, you may put the future health of your staff and pupils at risk. You could also face prosecution, by failing to comply with the [Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012](#).

You should take the following steps to manage the asbestos in your school:

1. Have a 'management survey' of asbestos-containing materials (ACMs) in your school
2. Assess the risks associated with ACMs in your school
3. Devise a plan for managing asbestos in your school
4. Make sure staff and visitors know the risks and precautions they need to take
5. Keep the management of asbestos in your school under review

If you need to undertake any refurbishment work in a building that contains asbestos you may need to commission a 'refurbishment and demolition survey' which will give you a more detailed understanding of the asbestos present in the building.

If there is an incident of asbestos exposure at your school you should take the necessary steps to ensure that everyone is safe and, unless the incident is very minor, you will need to report it to the Health and Safety Executive.

Asbestos in your school can put staff, pupils and visitors at risk

The majority of school buildings contain asbestos. If managed carefully, the presence of asbestos in your school will not pose a risk to your staff and pupils. However, poor management of asbestos in your school could endanger lives.

If materials containing asbestos are disturbed or damaged, asbestos fibres can be released into the air and breathed in by staff and children. This puts them at risk of contracting a number of serious diseases in later life, including mesothelioma and lung cancer.

The activities most likely to lead to the disturbance of asbestos-containing materials (ACMs) in schools are building and maintenance work. However, ACMs can also be disturbed through vandalism, accidental damage and boisterous behaviour.

The relative risks of asbestos exposure in a school setting and the question of whether children are intrinsically at greater risk than adults are not fully understood. However, the Department of Health's Committee on Carcinogenicity concluded that, due to their increased life expectancy compared to adults and the long latency period for the disease to develop, children have an increased lifetime risk of developing mesothelioma if exposed to a given dose of asbestos.

Key Resources:

[HSE website asbestos pages](#)

[HSE video: an asbestos victim's story](#)

Responsibility for the safe management of asbestos in your school

The legal responsibility for the safe management of asbestos lies with the 'duty holder'. The duty holder is the person responsible for maintenance and/or repair of the school – typically the employer. For community schools, community special schools, voluntary-controlled schools, maintained nursery schools and pupil referral units, the employer is the local authority. For academies, free schools, voluntary-aided and foundation schools, it will be the school governors. For independent schools, it may be the proprietor, governors or trustees.

In situations where budgets for building management are delegated to schools by the local authority, the duty to manage asbestos will be shared between schools and the local authority.

Even if you are not the legal 'duty holder' in your school, it is still your responsibility to play your part in the safe management of asbestos, just as head teachers and school leaders support the employer in a large number of other statutory responsibilities.

The law requires the employer to consult with employees on matters that affect their health and safety, including asbestos management. Union safety representatives can use their regular health and safety inspections to raise awareness of asbestos and discuss concerns with their members and management.

If you do not follow the steps set out in this advice, you may put the future health of your staff and pupils at risk. You could also face prosecution, by failing to comply with the Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012.

Key Resources:

[Who is the duty holder for your school?](#)

[The Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012](#)

[HSE enforcement policy](#)

[Advice on health and safety for schools](#)

[Consulting workers on health and safety](#)

Day-to-day management of asbestos in your school

Step 1: Conduct a management survey of asbestos-containing materials in your school

You will need to carry out an asbestos 'management survey' to identify those ACMs in your school which may be disturbed in the course of routine maintenance or everyday activities. You need to do this for all buildings constructed before 2000, including new buildings with residual elements of pre-2000 buildings. This survey must be comprehensive and systematic, establishing the location, type and condition of ACMs. The aim of the survey is to produce an asbestos register, which records the location and condition of the asbestos in your building. It should be conducted in accordance with HSE guidance and undertaken by a United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS) accredited surveying organisation.

The survey will look in all accessible places, including above the ceilings and in floor ducting. This may require some minor intrusion into the fabric of the building and the taking of samples to identify if materials contain asbestos. However, to avoid the spread of any asbestos fibres, disturbance should be kept to the minimum level necessary to undertake the survey. This means your management survey will only tell you about ACMs that are easily accessible. It is only suitable for managing asbestos during the normal occupation and use of your school. If you undertake any building works in your school, you may need a 'refurbishment and demolition' survey of the areas where the work is to take place in order to identify the presence of less easily accessible asbestos (see pages 11-12).

Schools may find it helpful to arrange for the surveyor to meet with school staff, for example the headteacher, to brief them on the survey once it is completed and advise them on the risks presented by the materials and how they should be managed. You can have these meetings included within the surveyor's terms of appointment.

Key Resources:

[HSE guidance on management surveys](#)

[Asbestos: the survey guide](#)

[The United Kingdom Accreditation Service \(UKAS\)](#)

Step 2: Assess the risks associated with asbestos-containing materials in your school

Once the management survey is complete, you must assess the risk associated with each identified occurrence of asbestos in the school as part of the Asbestos Management Plan (AMP, see page 9).

The assessment has three parts:

- i. **'Material' assessment** – this is usually provided within the survey and is an assessment of each item of asbestos material identified based upon the type of material, the type of asbestos it contains, its surface treatment and the extent of damage.
- ii. **'Priority' assessment** – this is your assessment of the likelihood of someone disturbing the material based upon factors such as the number and type (e.g. children) of people using the room, the time they spend in the room, the location, accessibility and extent of the asbestos and the frequency and type of activity that might disturb it.
- iii. **'Total' assessment** – the assessment from the Material and Priority assessment are combined to give the total risk assessment. This allows a comparison to be made of the risk presented by each item of ACMs in the building so that priorities can be set and plans made for managing the materials.

The HSE offers an example scoring system for the risk assessment (see 'Key Resources' box, below).

It is important that you – as the head teacher or leader of your school – work with your asbestos surveyor to establish the risk that ACMs will be disturbed. When considering the likelihood of disturbance it is important to recognise the use of the location and the people who may be present. Children may be more likely than adults to engage in activities that may disturb or damage ACMs – for example playing football in a corridor with asbestos ceiling tiles during unsupervised or unruly activities.

Key Resources:

[Example scoring system](#)

['Managing my Asbestos'](#) A step by step guide produced by HSE

['The comprehensive guide to managing asbestos in premises'](#) – A worked example of a priority assessment for a primary school can be found on pages 55 – 58 of this document.

Step 3: Devise a plan for managing asbestos in your school

Once you have established where in your school there are ACMs and assessed the associated 'Total' risk, you must plan how you will manage the risks and put those plans into action. The plans should include how you will communicate with and train relevant staff members regarding the risks. Your completed register with the risk rating of identified asbestos types and locations plus risk assessments and action plans will be your Asbestos Management Plan (AMP).

If asbestos in your school building is in good condition and is unlikely to be damaged or disturbed then it is usually safer to leave it in place and regularly monitor its condition. A change of circumstances (such as change of building use) will require a review of the AMP. If any ACM is in bad condition or at risk of being damaged or disturbed, professional advice should be sought regarding necessary remedial works, which may include encapsulating or removing the asbestos.

Your AMP will include details of:

- your plans to manage the risks from ACMs in the school on a day-to-day basis;
- arrangements to inform all staff and contractors about the location of ACMs;
- measures that need to be taken to prevent disturbing them;
- your plans to check for less easily accessible ACMs where intrusive work is planned; and
- the schedule for monitoring the condition of ACMs.

The AMP will need regular reviews and updates (see page 10).

Your management arrangements must also be effective during school closure periods when school staff presence is minimal.

Key Resources:

[An example AMP](#)

Step 4: Make sure staff and visitors know the risks and precautions they need to take

Everyone in your school management chain will have a part to play in making sure asbestos is managed effectively on your school premises. It is essential that you make

sure all relevant staff and other workers in your school receive the right information, instruction and training and are clear what precautions to follow. This will include caretakers and maintenance staff, and could include any member of the school staff that may damage ACMs. The level of information, instruction and training required will depend on the type of work being done.

Most teachers and school staff are not directly involved in managing the buildings or in carrying out repair or maintenance work. However, they will need to know the location of any ACMs and how they can be damaged or disturbed – for example, by work being pinned to walls or through unruly behaviour of pupils. You must instruct all staff to report damage or deterioration of school fixtures or fittings that could lead to the release of asbestos fibres.

You will also need to inform visitors to the school, for example contractors, of areas they should avoid or any other instructions they should follow.

Key Resources:

You can review how your school is performing on asbestos management by using the [Health and Safety Executive \(HSE\) checklist](#)

[Advice on information, instruction and training](#) is also available on the HSE website

Step 5: Keep the management of asbestos in your school under review

You will need to keep your Asbestos Management Plan under review. You must update it if:

- you get new information, for example from 'refurbishment and demolition' surveys;
- work is undertaken on ACMs;
- damage occurs; or
- ACMs are removed.

Your asbestos register should be used to record the regular inspections carried out by school personnel to check on the condition of ACMs. You should ensure that your register is reviewed at least annually. Any changes to the asbestos register or your Asbestos Management Plan will need to be communicated to all relevant staff.

Managing asbestos when building or maintenance work needs to be done

There are specific actions you must take where work is carried out on the premises which might disturb ACMs (including upgrading, refurbishing or demolishing). This includes any work that intrudes on the fabric of your building, whether it is small-scale repair work carried out by your own staff or a large-scale project that is being contracted out.

As your management survey will only have covered readily accessible areas, it may not have identified all of the ACMs that could be present. You will need to determine whether there is a risk that the work might disturb hidden ACMs. If so you may need to arrange for a 'refurbishment and demolition' survey to be carried out in the area where the work is to be done. This is a more intrusive type of survey which should be done under controlled conditions. It is unlikely to be appropriate for it to be done in occupied areas.

You must pass on the findings of both types of survey to those who will eventually be doing the work. You should also make sure that they understand and will take the information into account so that they use the correct risk control measures throughout the work.

Some small, short duration tasks can be carried out by non-licensed workers provided they have received appropriate information, instruction and training and the correct risk control measures are used. However, you must ensure that higher risk work, such as removal of asbestos lagging and loose insulation, is done by a contractor licensed by the HSE. You may need to notify the HSE of some types of non-licensed work. Advice on the types of work considered to be licensable and non-licensable, notifiable and non-notifiable is available on the HSE website (see key resources, below).

Waste materials containing asbestos must be disposed of as hazardous waste. If you have contracted the work out disposal is the responsibility of the contractor, although you will have responsibility for obtaining a waste consignment note to confirm that the asbestos was appropriately disposed of. If the work is carried out by in-house staff you will be responsible for ensuring any waste is disposed of safely.

Key Resources:

[Advice on licensable work with asbestos](#)

[Advice on non-licensed work with asbestos](#)

[Information on disposing of asbestos waste](#)

Key Resources:

Funding for the repair or maintenance of school buildings

Depending on the status of your school, the Government allocates funding for maintenance works, including work on asbestos, differently.

If your school is local authority maintained, a voluntary aided school or in a larger multi-academy trust, money is allocated to the body responsible for maintaining the school. More information about these allocations can be found on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk).

Smaller or standalone academy trusts and sixth-form colleges bid for capital funding through the [Condition Improvement Fund](#).

What to do if things go wrong

If something goes wrong and you find that there has been or may have been an unplanned disturbance of asbestos in the school you should:

- stop any activity in the affected area immediately;
- remove everyone from the affected area;
- Ensure that staff and pupils are not able to access the area and do not remove any items including equipment, books or personal possessions from the area;
- Get advice from an asbestos expert regarding any necessary remedial action; and
- Prevent access to the area until any necessary remedial action has been taken.

Unless the incident is very minor, notify the HSE. This is a legal requirement under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013 (RIDDOR).

Contractors carrying out work in the school should have procedures in place to deal with an unintended or unexpected release of asbestos. You should be advised of any such release, so that appropriate measures (including those set out above) can be taken as necessary.

People who have been exposed to asbestos are understandably anxious about the possible effects on their health. If staff, pupils, or their parents, are concerned about their exposure they should consult their GP.

Your school's asbestos management plan should detail the procedures for staff to follow in the event of an asbestos incident, and you must communicate this clearly to all staff.

Key Resources

[HSE asbestos checklist](#)

[HSE asbestos checklist frequently asked questions](#)

[HSE asbestos advice](#)

[HSE RIDDOR webpages](#)

[National Association of School Business Management](#)

[Joint Union Asbestos Committee](#)

[United Kingdom Accreditation Service](#)



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