

Asbestos in the Workplace

Asbestos was used in construction mainly between the 1950s and mid 1980s as a fire retardant/insulating material and may be present in buildings constructed or refurbished before it was banned in 1999. However, it continues to be found in all types of buildings including those relatively recently built.

Asbestos is most likely to be found in these locations:

- Sprayed asbestos and asbestos loose packing - generally used as fire protection in ducts, firebreaks in ceiling voids and around structural steel work;
- Moulded or pre-formed lagging - generally used in thermal insulation of pipes and boilers;
- Insulating boards used for fire protection, thermal insulation, partitioning and ducts e.g. panels, partitions, soffit boards and ceiling panels;
- Some ceiling tiles;
- Millboard, paper and paper products used for insulation of electrical equipment. Asbestos paper has also been used as a fire-proof facing on wood fibreboard;
- Asbestos cement products, which can be fully or semi-compressed into flat or corrugated sheets. Corrugated sheets are largely used as roofing and wall cladding. Other asbestos cement products include gutters, rainwater pipes and water tanks;
- Certain textured coatings;
- Bitumen roofing material;
- Vinyl or thermoplastic floor tiles.

Asbestos is only a risk to health if asbestos fibres are released into the air and inhaled. If it is in good condition and not likely to be damaged, worked on, or disturbed it is generally safer to leave it in place and manage it (depending on the risk of exposure/damage) by encapsulation and ongoing monitoring of its condition.

If left undisturbed asbestos poses no real threats. Most people are exposed to low amounts of fibres present in the atmosphere with no ill effects.

However, care should be taken to prevent the release of fibres as they can cause serious damage to your health. Asbestos fibres and dust are potentially dangerous if inhaled in high concentrations over a long period of time, when they can cause lung disease. The symptoms of these diseases often do not appear for between 20 and 30 years.

Asbestos is present in a number of Council buildings and steps have been taken to identify its location and compile an “asbestos register”. This register outlines the type and quantity of asbestos present along with detail about its location.

Over and above this there will be an asbestos management programme developed that will detail the mechanisms to be used to ensure the material is maintained in an undisturbed state pending its eventual removal.

Line managers will take steps to ensure employees who may come into contact with asbestos will receive some awareness training on the matter. This training may take the form of an online module or a team tool box talk.

Asbestos technicians within the council are able to provide specialised advice on this matter, although any concerns you have about asbestos can be raised with your line manager in the first instance.

As with all health and safety matters advice and guidance is always available from **Safety & Wellbeing team** healthandsafety@northlan.gov.uk

Support Available:

- Tool box talk template on asbestos
- Online awareness training
- GD 17 – Asbestos in the Workplace (NLC Guidance Document)
- AS20 – The Management of Asbestos In Council Managed Premises (Arrangement section)