



ASBESTOS AWARENESS

Asbestos is bad news. You were probably already aware of that. This workbook is more to give you an increased awareness of the nature and properties of asbestos and its effects on your health.

It'll also help you become familiar with the types, uses and likely occurrences of asbestos in your work.

And, importantly, what to do if you come across them.

By knowing more about asbestos, you'll more easily avoid any negative consequences.

Name _____



HOW TO USE THIS WORKBOOK

This workbook isn't going to be a literal shield against asbestos.

You can't walk into an environment with asbestos, holding this workbook, and think "pew, I'm safe".

You need to work with us for it to be effective.

And by work with us, we mean try to take in the information and put what you learn into practice.

For our part, we'll try and keep you from being bored, and make everything nice and easy to understand.

The workbook is designed to support the Asbestos Awareness e-learning course, so there might be a bit of overlap.

Don't worry – that'll just help the information stick.

Once you've finished, you'll have a shield to keep you safe against asbestos – your own knowledge.

Okay, that was cheesy, but you get the picture.

WHO SHOULD USE THIS WORKBOOK?

- Employers who want to keep their staff safe from harm
- Employees who don't want to fall foul of the health hazards of asbestos
- Anyone interested in learning more about asbestos for their own safety

KEY INSIGHTS

- The history of asbestos
- What asbestos is
- The problems asbestos causes
- How everyone exposed to asbestos is vulnerable
- Where asbestos might be found
- How to identify asbestos
- What to do if you suspect you've found asbestos
- The legislation surrounding asbestos
- To take asbestos as seriously as any other deadly substance

ASBESTOS IS AWESOME!

You might have been aware of this already, but when asbestos became readily available in the 1800s, everybody loved it.

Humans have been mining it for thousands of years, and had no idea how dangerous it could be.

It's cheap. It absorbs electricity, sound and heat energy. It's fairly strong.

What's not to love?

So, we put it in loads of building and electrical insulation.

What we didn't know, at the time, was that prolonged inhalation can cause loads of devastating illnesses. Fatal illnesses.

Like lung cancer; scarred, inflamed lungs; and other tissue cancers.

By the 1920s and '30s, we started catching on.

By the '80s and '90s, the trade and use of asbestos was restricted, or banned, in many countries.

Unfortunately, that doesn't mean the danger has disappeared.

Many buildings still have asbestos-containing materials (or ACM).

In fact, it still kills around 5,000 workers each year. That's more than the number of people killed on UK roads.

Asbestos exposure kills somebody every five hours.

Around 20 tradesmen die each week from past exposure.

Sadly, this is predicted to rise in the UK due to exposure of workers in existing installations.

One of the reasons the danger is still so real is people aren't given the right training.

Luckily, there are strict guidelines in place for dealing with the threat of asbestos.

We'll go through them with you shortly.

WHAT IS ASBESTOS? AND WHY IS IT OUT TO GET ME?

Asbestos is a naturally occurring fibrous material. One of 6 in its family.

The name's from the Greek, and means inextinguishable.

There are a few forms of asbestos you're likely to come across.

- Blue asbestos – Crocidolite
- Brown asbestos – Amosite
- White asbestos – Chrysotile

Blue and brown are thought of as the most dangerous, but white's no picnic either.

Despite their names, they're not always the colour they say they are. They're tricky like that.

What happens with asbestos is its fibres flake off when it's disturbed. Kind of like a dog shedding when you pet it. And like dog hairs, they get everywhere. Including into the air.

The difference is, they're much smaller fibres. You can breathe them in.

If you do, they can cause horrible illnesses and tumours.

The most common illnesses are called asbestosis and mesothelioma.

Asbestosis is the easiest to remember as it's just asbestos with -is on the end.

It's an inflammatory, scarring disease that affects lung tissue.

What happens is the tiny fibres end up deep in the lungs, scratching and embedding in the air sacs.

If you have it, you'll notice shortness of breath, especially with physical activity.

It can cause lung or other tissue cancers. It can also lead on to mesothelioma.

Mesothelioma is a type of cancer that affects the thin tissue around your organs (called the mesothelium – hence the name).

In this case, it's the tissue around the lungs and chest wall, though it can affect other tissues too.

Like asbestosis, it can be caused by inhaling fibres, or even transferred to the gut by swallowing your asbestos-contaminated spit. Which, I think we can agree, is pretty disgusting.

The symptoms don't appear straight away. When they do, they include shortness of breath, a cough, and pain in the chest due to an accumulation of fluid in the space around the lungs.

It's serious business. More than half the people diagnosed die from the illness.

QUICK QUIZ

Feel confident that asbestos is serious yet?

Good.

Let's see what else you've learned. Here's a few quick questions.

Besides, by writing stuff down, it'll help you remember.

Q1: Why did people use asbestos in the first place, if it's so dangerous?

Q2: What can asbestos exposure cause?

Q3: What are a few types of asbestos?

OKAY, SO ASBESTOS IS DEFINITELY BAD, BUT THAT STUFF OHNLY HAPPENS TO OTHERS

Even if you never said that, we're gonna rebuff it.

A lot of people have that attitude.

Including a lot of people who died, no doubt.

It's a logical fallacy known as 'optimism bias'.

You're just as likely as anyone else to catch it, under the same circumstances.

All we can do is try to change the circumstances.

In this case, that means arming you with knowledge about where you might find asbestos and ACM, and how to react when you do.

TO START, LET'S LOOK AT SOME PLACES ACMS APPEAR.

Any building that was either built or refurbished before the 21st Century is a red flag for asbestos, whether that's a house, office or any other building type.

It can be found in all sorts of common areas of domestic buildings: halls, stairwells, lift shafts, roof spaces – that kind of thing.

Because everyone loved it for being so durable, it was thrown around everywhere, especially:

- Insulation material for buildings, boilers and pipes
- Insulating board to protect buildings and ships against fire
- Asbestos cement for roofing tiles and pipes

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SO, I'VE GOT MY SUSPICIONS. HOW DO I KNOW IF THERE'S ACTUALLY ASBESTOS PRESENT?

Well, it's important you find out, before you start any work.

Some products contain identification marks, which will advise whether the material contains asbestos.

There are certain obvious visual clues to high risk materials such as:

- Asbestos pipe lagging
- Asbestos Insulating Board (AIB)
- Perforated AIB ceiling tiles
- Doors with AIB panels

That's not an exhaustive list – asbestos was used in many other materials.

However, a lot of the time, you can't tell by just looking.

If you are in doubt, it is safer to presume that a material contains asbestos, unless there is strong evidence that it doesn't.

ASBESTOS ALERT! WHAT DO I DO?

Don't panic!

This is just a workbook, snap out of it!

Unless you're reading this page just as you've encountered some asbestos. In which case – good timing.

Some frayed asbestos can be made safe by repairing it. Then, either sealing or enclosing it to prevent further damage.

This can be done by trained professionals, typically a contractor licensed by HSE. If this can be done safely, the area is marked and is added to a record of asbestos locations.

If it can't be easily repaired and protected, you should have it removed. This work must be carried out by someone trained and competent to carry out the task.

If you're unsure, step away and report it.

No-one's going to call you a grass for snitching on a deadly material. You'll more likely get a pat on the back.

Takeaway

So the things you have to remember so far:

- Asbestos = bad
- If you're in a structure built before this century, keep an eye out
- If you think you've found some, report it

Easy

THE LONG ARM OF ASBESTOS LAW.

This section is going to run through asbestos legislation.

Don't cry! It's not that boring. And it's pretty simple. And you need to know it.

So, they released some new regulations in April 2012, replacing the previous 2006 law.

The changes included:

- Designating areas where you are working on asbestos
- Medical surveillance
- Record keeping
- New requirements for certain types of non-licensable work with asbestos on notification of work

You can see the Approved Code of Practice and Guidance Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012 on the HSE website, if you like.

The key points are these.

There's now a regulation (Regulation 4) covering the basic framework for managing ACM.

It covers the duty to manage asbestos in non-domestic premises (so commercial buildings, offices, etc.).

The duty holders have to identify the location and condition of asbestos in these buildings, and manage the risk to prevent harm to anyone who works there, or the occupants.

It also explains what's required of people to enable them to comply with the regulation.

Another regulation (number 5) requires employers to identify the presence of asbestos, its type and its condition before any building, maintenance, demolition or other work, liable to disturb asbestos, begins.

It also sets out the requirement to arrange a survey if existing information on the presence of asbestos in the premises is half-done, or seems a bit iffy.

And lastly, Regulation 6 places a duty on employers to entirely prevent the exposure of their employees to asbestos so far as is reasonably practicable.

Which is fair enough, right?

So that's:

- Find asbestos and manage its risk
- Identify it before starting work
- Keep employees away from it

Simple enough.

QUICK QUIZ 2

You probably hate doing these by now.

But they're good for you.

A lot like asbestos safety processes themselves

.

They might seem like they're slowing you down and getting in the way, but really, they're designed to help you.

So, get a few of these questions down you, and stay safe.

Q4: Where might you find asbestos in a building?

Q5: What should you do on encountering a suspected ACM (and for extra credit, what does ACM stand for?)

Q6: What were the key points from the three regulations from the Approved Code of Practice and Guidance Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012 we discussed?

FINAL SUMMARY

Here's what we want you to close this workbook knowing:

- Asbestos is seriously dangerous.
- It's typically found in older buildings, whether they're domestic, commercial, industrial – whatever – so be wary around those built or refurbished before 2000.
- Look out for identification marks, but don't assume that just because there isn't one, it's safe.
- If you come across asbestos – REPORT IT. Let a professional deal with it.

You might think it feels like handholding, but who knows – maybe if we were more asbestos-aware a few decades ago, there'd be far fewer deaths today.

You don't want to be part of those statistics a few years down the line.

So take care.