

## Asbestos health and safety

Asbestos is one of the most toxic materials to have been used in industry and construction in the last century. However, asbestos is not just a problem of the past - it can be found in any building built before the year 2000 and causes around 5,000 deaths every year, more than the number of people killed on the road. Anyone in older buildings is liable to be at risk, but certain activities bear particular risks.

Those particularly at risk are those who work in the trades, eg heating and ventilation engineers, electricians, plumbers, demolition workers, carpenters and joiners, roofing contractors, painters and decorators, plasterers, construction workers, fire and burglar alarm installers, shop fitters, gas fitters, computer and data installers, telecommunications engineers, architects, building surveyors and similar professionals, cable layers; also general maintenance staff such as caretakers. Around 20 tradespeople die each week as a result of past exposure.



Fibres are released into the air when materials that contain asbestos are disturbed or damaged and these fibres can cause serious diseases when they are inhaled. The diseases often take a long time to develop but once diagnosed it is often too late to do anything.

So we are left with a legacy from the past use of asbestos including:

- the health implications of past and future exposure to asbestos dust;
- the vast amount of material containing asbestos still in the community; and
- differing public perceptions of the dangers.

The challenge is to deal with the remaining material in a safe way. Those responsible should have assessed the potential risks of asbestos in their premises and activities.

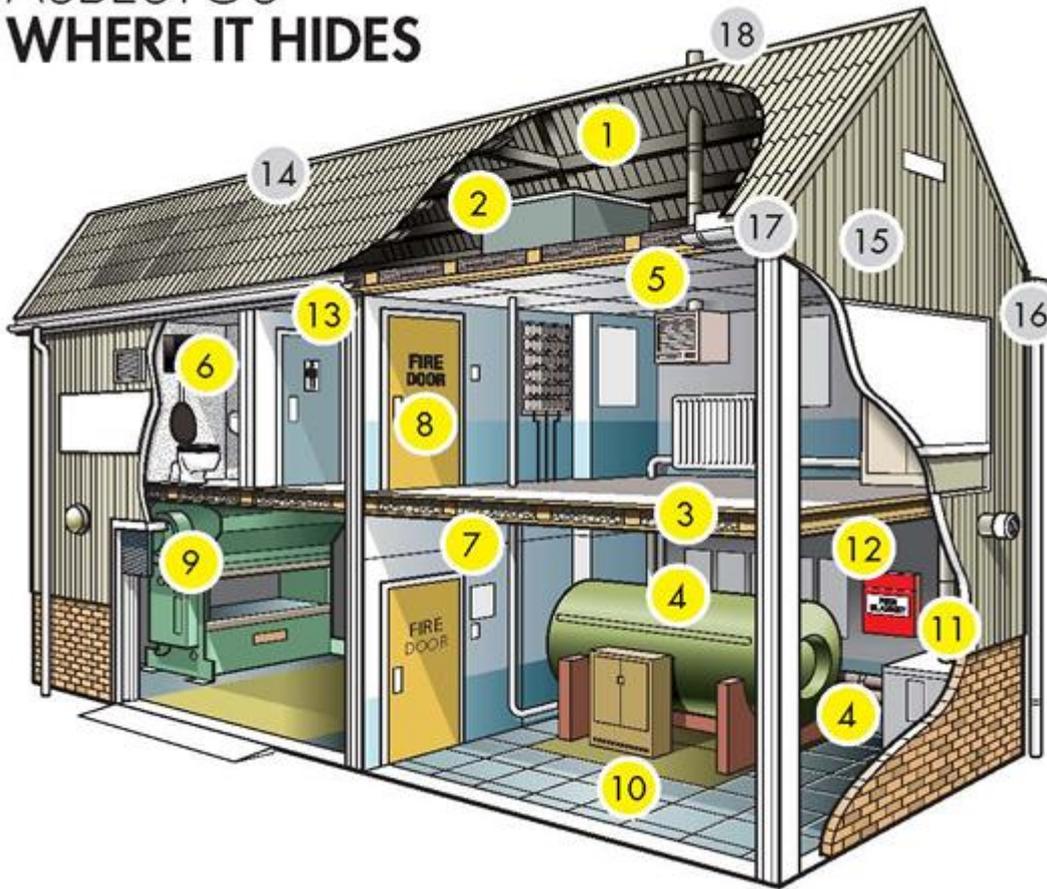
To help you, there is a wealth of useful information and guidance on asbestos on the HSE website at [www.hse.gov.uk/asbestos](http://www.hse.gov.uk/asbestos), including:

- [why asbestos is dangerous](#)
- [where asbestos can be found](#)
- [what asbestos looks like](#)
- [managing and working with asbestos](#)
- [a step by step guide to managing asbestos](#)
- [the duty to manage asbestos](#)
- [managing asbestos in buildings](#)
- [asbestos Approved Code of Practice and Guidance](#)
- [asbestos risk assessment](#)
- [asbestos surveys](#)
- [asbestos training](#)
- [frequently asked questions](#)
- [the Beware Asbestos web app](#)
- [the legislation related to asbestos](#)
- [asbestos licensing](#)
- [Asbestos Essentials task sheets](#)
- [learning package for apprentices](#)
- [case studies](#)
- [publications](#)
- [video clips](#)
- [research and reports](#)

You can also keep up to date with news and information about asbestos by subscribing to HSE's [asbestos ebulletin](#). In the event of concern it is advised that you take professional advice.

## Asbestos health and safety

# ASBESTOS WHERE IT HIDES



### Inside

1. Sprayed coatings on ceilings, walls, beams and columns
2. Asbestos cement water tank
3. Loose fill insulation
4. Lagging on boilers and pipes
5. AIB ceiling tiles
6. Toilet seat and cistern
7. AIB partition walls
8. AIB panels in fire doors
9. Asbestos rope seals, gaskets and paper
10. Vinyl floor tiles
11. AIB around boilers
12. Textiles eg fire blankets
13. Textured decorating coatings on walls and ceilings eg artex

### Outside

14. Asbestos cement roof
15. Asbestos cement panels
16. Asbestos cement gutters and downpipes
17. Soffits – AIB or asbestos cement
18. Asbestos cement flue

AIB = Asbestos Insulating Board

## Asbestos health and safety

### When is someone most at risk from asbestos?

People are most at risk from asbestos when:

- the building being worked on was built before the year 2000
- the site is unfamiliar
- there isn't a risk assessment
- asbestos-containing materials are not identified before the job starts
- asbestos-containing materials are identified but this information is not passed on by the people in charge to the people doing the work
- identified asbestos has become damaged or is not monitored routinely to check that it is being maintained properly
- those working don't know how to recognise and work safely with asbestos
- those working have not had appropriate information, instruction and training
- those working know how to work safely with asbestos but choose to put themselves and others at risk by not following proper precautions, perhaps to save time or because no one else is following proper procedures.

### Remember

- Asbestos fibres can't be seen or smelt in the air.
- The effects of being exposed to asbestos take many years to show.
- People who smoke and are also exposed to asbestos fibres are at a much greater risk of developing lung cancer.
- Asbestos is only a danger when fibres are made airborne and can be breathed in.
- As long as asbestos is in good condition and located somewhere where it can't be damaged easily then it shouldn't be a significant risk.
- Check out [HSE's website](#) for information and guidance about asbestos.

### Asbestos and the law

The specific piece of legislation covering asbestos is the [Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012](#).

The [Approved Code of Practice \(ACOP\) and guidance for managing and working with asbestos](#) sets out legal duties and gives practical advice on complying with the law.

### Where to find information about asbestos

[www.hse.gov.uk/asbestos](http://www.hse.gov.uk/asbestos)