

ASBESTOS IN SCHOOLS

How to Check your Schools Asbestos Management

Actions after the Asbestos Survey

Once the survey has been completed then the asbestos that has been found will have to be managed. The school should produce an asbestos management plan and will be able to show it to you.

Regular Inspections

Inspections The asbestos should be regularly inspected to make sure that it does not become damaged. A busy corridor should be inspected more regularly than the caretakers hut. The plan should record the dates of the inspections. The time between inspections should be a minimum of six months for the hut and probably monthly for the corridor. The person carrying out the inspection need not be a qualified surveyor, but they should be trained, know where the asbestos is and be able to assess its condition. The designated "Asbestos officer" is the ideal person

Tell people where the asbestos is and tell them about the health risks

Telling People The school should tell everyone who is likely to disturb the asbestos about the dangers of asbestos, where it is and how they should avoid damaging it. This includes the teachers, secretaries, maintenance staff, cleaners, cooks, dinner ladies and helpers.

Telling Parents It is up to the school governors whether the parents are told of the plan. [The article on this site on asbestos management](#) demonstrates that informing parents annually ensures the plan is open to proper scrutiny by those most affected.

Telling Children It is up to the school governors whether the children are told of the plan. You may wish to put your own views to the Governors.

Health and Safety Executive policy on informing parents HSE policy is that only those who could possibly disturb asbestos should be told about it. As parents do not disturb asbestos in the school they do not believe you should be told about it.

This is clearly wrong as your children are the ones who disturb the asbestos and you, as parents, should know of the risks your child is running and should be able to monitor those risks by ensuring the asbestos management plan is effective.

Plan should cover action to protect asbestos from damage

There are various ways of making sure that the asbestos is not damaged.

Total Removal. The most effective is total removal. If asbestos is removed then it is a permanent solution and it will never have to be managed again. The Department of Education and the HSE consider that it is better to manage asbestos in a school than removing it. This can only be the case if there is a fail safe and effective system of management. If the asbestos is in bad condition then it should be removed. If the asbestos is in a place where there is a likely-hood that it could be regularly damaged or knocked then it should be removed. If it is left in place then action has to be taken to make it safe:

Labelling. The least effective is labelling the asbestos. This can work in an office, and indeed can work in parts of the school where the children have no access. However vandalism, accidents or plain curiosity will ensure that it cannot work anywhere else in the school. Some LEAs have managed their asbestos by this means in all of their schools. It is not safe, it is completely unacceptable in any place where children could damage the asbestos.

Enclosing. This involves building a physical barrier around the asbestos so that it cannot be knocked, hit or poked. Boarding up a wall is a barrier, however great care has to be taken to fix the board so that screws, nails and drilling don't damage the asbestos during construction. A barrier can work in a place with little activity, however the barrier has to be airtight so that any loose asbestos fibres cannot creep around the edges. In a place with lots of activity then the barrier is likely to be knocked, in which case the disturbance can stir up any loose asbestos

fibres and might break an airtight seal. A notice should be put on the enclosure stating that the enclosure contains asbestos.

Encapsulation and sealing. Encapsulation involves painting, spraying or trowelling on a substance that seals the surface. This can be a cement coating, a PVA covering or a high build elastomer coating. The problem is that cement will crack over time or if hit. PVA only gives a thin covering and can be broken and it is not suitable as a long term solution. An elastic coating does flex and will withstand some amount of punishment and if left undisturbed will last for up to 20 years.

Spraying Another method is applying a spray of a substance that penetrates the asbestos and strengthens it as well as forming a thin outer coating.

Problem areas with encapsulating and sealing

- Encapsulating or sealing can de-laminate the asbestos and release fibres.
- The encapsulation and sealing can only be applied to asbestos in good condition.
- Encapsulating or sealing is not a viable option in any place where it is likely to be frequently knocked or poked.
- Any encapsulating or sealing in a school should only be done by an asbestos removal contractor licensed by the HSE. If it has been done by the schools maintenance man, then it is likely that he was not qualified to do the job. A qualified asbestos contractor should check the work.
- Whatever method is used all have to be regularly monitored to ensure that the system is working.

Plan should cover repairs

Repairs to asbestos should always be carried out in controlled conditions so that asbestos fibres are not released. Staff and children should not be allowed anywhere near the work. Any major repairs should be undertaken while the children are not there, and preferably during the school holidays. In the interim the room should be sealed and locked. Some minor work can be carried out by the school's maintenance contractors, however almost all other work on asbestos in a school should be carried out by a licensed asbestos contractor.

Plan should record encapsulation, sealing, repairs

Any encapsulation, sealing, repairs or removal should be recorded in the Asbestos management plan stating where and when the job was done, by whom and what was done.

Keeping the Management Plan up to date

- It is very important that the school keeps its management plan up to date and records any changes, incidents, repairs, inspections and surveys. It is also necessary to have a method to monitor that the system is working.
- A good practice is to have the Chairman of Governors read and then sign the asbestos management plan annually. It is his responsibility that the plan is effective and therefore his signature acknowledges that he knows that it is.
- In America it is law that the teachers and parents are annually updated on the asbestos management plan. This is an excellent idea and ensures that those with the greatest interest in having an effective system can judge for themselves whether it is or not. The school authorities will invariably wish to be above criticism and so will ensure that their plan and system of implementing it, is effective. Any faults will invariably be identified and can be rapidly rectified.

Contingency plan in the event of damage

The plan should cover the action to take if asbestos is damaged.

The link describes this and takes you to [what to do after an incident.](#)

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