

For: Oxfordshire County Council Schools  
Headteachers, bursars, site managers, caretakers

## Asbestos management in schools

This guidance explains the risk of asbestos and actions required to manage asbestos containing materials (ACMs) that may be present. Further information can be found in the property's Asbestos Management Folder.

### What is asbestos?

Asbestos was a building material used extensively in the construction of buildings from the 1950s through to the 1990s.

### Where is asbestos found in schools?

Many schools in Oxfordshire, built before 2000, will contain some form of asbestos. Asbestos containing materials (ACMs) include:

- asbestos lagging used as thermal insulation on pipes and boilers
- sprayed asbestos used for thermal insulation, fire protection, partitioning and ducts
- asbestos-insulating board (AIB) used for fire protection, thermal insulation, partitioning and ducts
- some ceiling tiles and wall panels
- floor tiles
- cement roofing, guttering, flues
- textured coatings

### Who's at risk from asbestos in schools?

Asbestos can present a health risk when it is disturbed or damaged through maintenance, repair or construction activities. School caretakers are a particular group at risk due to the nature of their work, e.g. drilling and fixing, and other contractors may be at risk while undertaking maintenance or installation work. If asbestos is disturbed during such work, there is a risk that fibres will be released and create risk to others in the school.

Asbestos that is in good condition and unlikely to be damaged or disturbed is not a risk to health as long as it is properly managed. This means that teachers and pupils are unlikely to be at risk in the course of their normal activities. However, they should not undertake activities that damage ACMs, such as pinning or tacking work to insulation board or ceiling tiles.

### Who's responsible for managing asbestos in schools?

Anyone who has responsibility for the maintenance and/or repair of non-domestic premises, including schools, is a 'dutyholder' as defined in Regulation 4 of the Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012. For the majority of schools, the dutyholder will be the employer.

Who the employer is varies with the type of school. Oxfordshire County Council is the employer for community schools, community special schools and voluntary-controlled schools.

The school governors are the employer for academies, voluntary-aided and foundation schools. For independent schools, it may be the proprietor, governors or trustees.

Where budgets for building management are delegated to schools by Oxfordshire County Council, the duty to manage asbestos will be shared between schools and the Council. The Council's written scheme for the financing of maintained schools will set out the categories of work that will either be financed from the delegated school budget share (revenue repairs and maintenance) or remain the responsibility of the Council (capital expenditure). Both parties will therefore have 'duty-holder' responsibilities for the repair and maintenance of the premises.

### **What is the 'duty to manage' asbestos?**

Duty-holders should know whether their premises contain asbestos, where it is, what condition it is in and manage it properly.

They must assess and manage the risks from asbestos to employees and others. They must also ensure that anyone who is likely to work on, or disturb, asbestos is provided with information about its location and condition.

### **What do Oxfordshire County Council schools have to do in practice?**

The school must be familiar with and comply with the Council's policy and procedures for the management of asbestos. Further information can be found in the school 'Asbestos Management Folder'.

A management survey has been carried out to identify the type and location of ACMs and a copy of the schools asbestos register is contained within the 'Asbestos Management Folder'. This register must be kept up to date i.e. when surveys are carried out or as a result of any work that affects asbestos materials. A copy of the schools asbestos records can be obtained from the Property Helpdesk, telephone: 0808 156 6659 or email: [propertyhelpdesk@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:propertyhelpdesk@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

The school's 'Asbestos Management Folder' will contain procedures for the school to manage asbestos on a day-to-day basis.

Those most at risk of disturbing ACMs are tradespeople, caretakers, etc. The school's plan needs to contain provisions to ensure that information about the location and condition of ACMs is given to anyone who might disturb these materials. Schools must ensure that staff and contractors likely to disturb asbestos are suitably trained.

Further information on Asbestos Awareness Training can be obtained from the Oxfordshire Skills and Learning Service, telephone: 01865 797123 or email: [LandD.sharedservices@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:LandD.sharedservices@oxfordshire.gov.uk).

### **What is the role of school staff?**

Most staff will not be directly involved in managing the buildings or in carrying out repair or maintenance work. However, staff still need to be made aware of the potential hazards. All staff should be instructed not to disturb or damage ACMs for

example by pinning work to walls and surfaces. They should also report damage to school fixtures or fittings that could lead to the release of asbestos fibres, e.g. damage to ceiling or floor tiles, or to column seals in system-built schools.

### **What about pupils – can they damage asbestos?**

The schools asbestos management plan should consider the likelihood of pupils disturbing ACMs during supervised or unruly activities and ensure that normal school activities do not disturb or damage asbestos. Any vulnerable or exposed asbestos should be identified and protected or removed.

### **Undertaking delegated work**

The most likely way that ACMs in schools will be disturbed or damaged is through maintenance, repair or construction activities. This includes even seemingly innocuous jobs such as installing telephone or computer cabling where access behind wall panels and to ceiling voids is often needed. Incidents of contamination have also resulted from refurbishment work that has not been properly managed. In these situations, it is those directly involved in the work that have the greatest risk of exposure to asbestos fibres – and regulations are in place to ensure this type of work is carried out properly.

The school must ensure checks are made at the earliest opportunity when considering or planning delegated work under their control, including repair and maintenance work, to identify any asbestos materials that may be affected by the work. The Asbestos Register must be checked before undertaking any work. Only licensed contractors may undertake licensable work and all appropriate work must be notified to the relevant enforcing authority.

Submissions under the self-financed improvement projects, building, engineering and grounds schemes must include details of any asbestos materials likely to be affected by the work. A refurbishment / demolition asbestos survey carried out by a competent contractor is likely to be required when carrying out alteration, refurbishment or demolition work. The Property and Facilities Service Provider (Carillion) can give advice in relation to organising asbestos surveys.

Details of any additional asbestos materials discovered during surveys must be forwarded to the Property and Facilities Service Provider (Carillion) for inclusion on the Asbestos Register.

### **What do schools need to know about using contractors?**

Schools need to check that any contractors likely to disturb asbestos are trained and competent for that work. Licensed contractors must be used for most work with asbestos.

Those responsible for managing asbestos on the school premises should brief contractors, whether procured through the Council or directly procured by the school. They should ensure that contractors are provided with all recorded information on the location and condition of ACMs and sign the record sheet contained in the Asbestos Management Folder.

### **Urgent work to repair or remove damaged asbestos**

The Council will fund the cost of any work to repair or remove damaged asbestos.

## **Asbestos in boiler/plant rooms**

ACMs were commonly used in the construction and insulation of boiler/plant rooms.

Whilst undertaking Refurbishment and Demolition surveys of boiler rooms asbestos debris and residue has been discovered in some properties.

Debris and residue is not always easily identifiable and can be present in dust deposits on floors and ledges or small deposits bonded to walls and pipework which may be painted over.

The source of asbestos debris is not always obvious or known and can result from damage to known asbestos containing materials or from historical asbestos removal (the quality of historical asbestos removal would not meet today's standards).

**Where asbestos debris and residue has been identified or suspected access to the boiler/plant room should be restricted and reported to the Property Helpdesk immediately.**

Asbestos materials in a damaged condition, often with associated debris, must not be disturbed. Access to the area should be prevented to all persons until the area has been deemed safe for reoccupation by the Council's service provider (Carillion). This will usually be as soon as removal works have been completed of following an environmental clean by a licensed contractor. The Council's centrally managed property and facilities budget will fund works related to reactive asbestos incidents.

## **Asbestos in ceiling/roof voids**

Ceiling voids can be contaminated from the original installation of the ACMs – or where remedial or cabling work has not been carried out to the required standards. This means roof voids may contain debris from original installation of ACMs, and this can include off-cuts and waste pieces of Asbestos Insulation Board. Provided the waste material is left undisturbed it does not present a risk elsewhere in the buildings.

The school's Asbestos Management Plan should set out how to manage and prevent disturbing any ACMs in the ceiling voids. Any work involving voids above ceilings does need to be carefully managed. Accessing contaminated roof voids without appropriate decontamination procedures can disturb asbestos fibres that may have remained undisturbed for many years – creating risks to those entering the roof voids and risking spreading wider contamination to other parts of the building. Therefore voids above asbestos ceiling tiles should be assumed to be contaminated and all access and work properly controlled. Any roof voids where work is carried out should be thoroughly cleaned on completion of any work.

## **What types of monitoring and testing are necessary for asbestos in school?**

The condition of ACMs can be monitored effectively by visual inspection and checking for any signs of damage. If there is no visible damage - for example no signs of visible debris, dust or asbestos material in poor condition - then the potential for release, spread and exposure is low. Visual inspections carried out by the school and any action taken should be recorded in the asbestos management folder.

## Reporting damage to known or suspected asbestos materials

### Important Message: Be Vigilant!

Schools **must report** any **damage** to known or suspected asbestos containing materials **immediately** to the Property Helpdesk, telephone: 0808 156 6659 or email: [propertyhelpdesk@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:propertyhelpdesk@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

### If you think you have discovered damaged asbestos:



**STOP** work immediately



**DO NOT** clean up damage or vacuum debris  
Close-off and restrict area. E.g. lock door and post warning notices  
'DO NOT ENTER – DAMAGED ASBESTOS'



**INFORM** the manager responsible for the premises and **REPORT** to the Property Helpdesk Tel: 0808 156 6659



**FOLLOW ADVICE** given by the Property Helpdesk

### I know how important it is to manage asbestos in my school – where can I get straightforward advice about what I need to do?

Details of known asbestos in school premises and procedures for the management of asbestos can be found in the site 'Asbestos Management Folder'. It is important that this information is kept up to date and school staff responsible for managing asbestos are competent and understand what is required. Further information and guidance can be obtained from:

For further information and advice:

## Property Helpdesk

Telephone: 0808 156 6659

email: [propertyhelpdesk@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:propertyhelpdesk@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

Further guidance for schools is also available on the HSE's website. It provides clear advice and links to further sources of information. It explains the risks, and the action that is necessary – and what the law actually requires.