



OAKBRIDGE FEDERATION

School Staff Asbestos Aide Memoire

What is Asbestos?

Asbestos is a fibrous material that was once used in building constructions, due to its heat-resistant and insulating properties. It was fully banned from use in 1999, as breathing in its carcinogenic fibres poses a major risk to health. However, buildings that were constructed pre-2000, such as older schools, may still contain it.



Any asbestos-containing materials (ACMs) in school buildings will not put people's health in danger if they are left alone. **The fibres only pose a risk if you disturb them.** The problem, however, is that asbestos is difficult to spot and could be anywhere, as it was originally used widely and for various areas in buildings.

Why is Asbestos in Schools a Problem?

Asbestos is dangerous no matter what premises you're in, but the nature of schools and their ACMs make them particularly high risk. The primary problems are risk of exposure; without an awareness, asbestos can be easy to disturb; deterioration of ACMs in old schools; and exposure being disruptive and costly. Let's explore these areas in more detail.

Risk of Exposure

Asbestos in school buildings poses a major risk to potentially hundreds of people, including pupils and staff. What's more is that these people could be at risk of asbestos exposure for a **seriously long period of time** – whether it's teachers who work there for years, or pupils who study there for their entire primary or secondary education.

Without an Awareness, Asbestos Can Be Easy to Disturb

The risk of disturbing asbestos is significant if teachers, pupils, and anyone who needs to do work in the building – such as contractors – are unaware of its presence and dangers. Pupils in particular may not fully grasp the severity of asbestos risks and may accidentally disturb it without much consideration of their actions.

Deterioration of ACMs in old schools

ACMs pose a particularly high risk in old school buildings because asbestos was mostly installed in them between the 1940s – 1970s.

This means that, over time, the ACMs in these old schools have been naturally deteriorating, which can lead to asbestos fibres being released.

Given that schools are heavily occupied, the risk of deterioration is even greater, and the chances of exposure are incredibly high.

Exposure is Disruptive and Costly

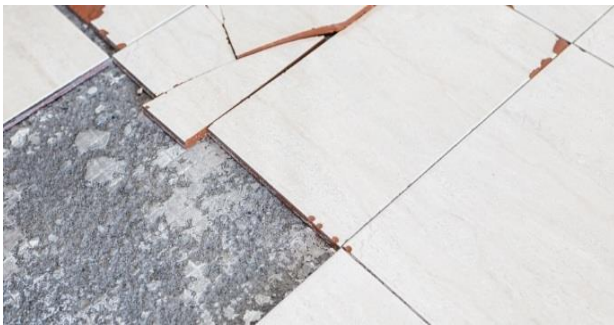
Not only is disturbing asbestos a real threat to people's wellbeing, but it can also be **extremely disruptive and costly for schools**. A major asbestos disturbance could result in the school needing to temporarily relocate hundreds of pupils for safety reasons, while removal and decontamination is underway.

As you can see, it's crucial for duty holders of schools to manage asbestos, especially if maintenance work needs doing. Furthermore, everyone needs to do their part in preventing exposure. This means you need to know **where asbestos might be present** in your school.

Where Can Asbestos Be Found in Schools?

Various areas of school buildings may contain asbestos, but it's difficult to identify immediately because it's usually **inside** something.

For example, in a wall cavity for insulation. What's more problematic is that it's often hidden in plain sight, and people are usually completely unaware of it.



It's crucial for you to know what the most common asbestos-containing materials in schools are, so you can avoid – and prevent others from – disturbing them.

Examples of Asbestos-Containing Materials in Schools

Examples of asbestos-containing materials	Examples of where they may be in a school	Examples of how people may disturb them
Floor and ceiling tiles	In toilets, classrooms, corridors, staff rooms, cupboards, gyms, and halls.	Contractors removing the tiles, Pupils accidentally hitting the ceiling with a ball, vandalism, or damage from general wear and tear
Pipework	Exposed pipes in classrooms, corridors, and boiler rooms.	Knocked into by a desk chair or being disturbed during maintenance work.
Window frames	Classroom, dining hall and corridor windows.	Being picked at by pupils or disrupted due to general wear and tear of using the window.
Insulation boards	In walls & columns, such as those in toilets, classrooms, corridors, staff rooms, cupboards, and halls.	Puncturing or damaging the wall, e.g. a teacher putting up a display with drawing pins or a pupil knocking into it.
Cement and plaster	Spray finishes on walls, ceilings, and columns.	Damaging or disrupting the integrity of the structure, e.g. a contractor drilling into it or staff putting up posters with a staple gun.
Roofing	Exterior roofing of school.	Disturbed during contractor work or accidentally damaged by a football.
Boiler insulation	Boiler rooms.	Cleaners maintaining the room and general wear and tear.

What are the Legal Duties of Schools that Contain Asbestos?

The Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012 places a legal responsibility on schools' duty holders to manage asbestos. This refers to those in charge of the school's maintenance or who have some control of the premises – usually the local authority or governing body along with the Head Teacher.

Their duties include, but are not limited, to:

- **Making and keeping up-to-date records** of the location and condition of asbestos-containing materials, or materials which are presumed to contain asbestos. They should assume that materials do contain asbestos unless they have strong evidence to the contrary.
- **Assessing the risk** of ACMs being disturbed and consequently exposing people to asbestos fibres.
- **Preparing a plan** that identifies which parts of the premises contain asbestos. They must set out in detail how the risks from these materials will be managed. This doesn't necessarily require duty holders to immediately arrange for asbestos removal in schools. The HSE currently recommends that it's safer to leave undamaged ACMs alone and introduce a system of management. If a risk assessment identifies that ACMs are highly vulnerable to being disturbed or degrading, they may need to consider arranging for removal to eliminate the risk.
- **Sharing information** on the location and condition of the materials to anyone who is liable to work on or disturb them, including staff and contractors.

It's therefore expected that duty holders **share information about asbestos in the school** with staff members – particularly site and premises staff. This information should be passed on to teachers, and anyone else who works in the school, who may be at risk of disturbing or being exposed to the asbestos. The duty of preventing asbestos risks then extends to you.

In some cases – such as if the risk is high but removal hasn't been arranged – it may also be appropriate for staff to receive **asbestos awareness training**. This provides a greater level of understanding about asbestos. However, a basic awareness of where asbestos is in your school and what procedures to follow is still essential, as no two premises are the same.

A plan to show the location of asbestos or areas where there is presumed asbestos is available for you to see in the premises office.

What Should I Do If I Find Asbestos in My School?

If you accidentally disturb asbestos, taking the necessary steps to protect yourself and others is critical.



STOP. If you think you've discovered or disturbed asbestos, stop whatever you were doing.

LEAVE. Leave the material alone. Do not try to remove or repair it, such as if you break a tile. Trying to put it back to normal could make things worse.

ALERT. Let a senior member of staff – e.g., Premises Manager / Head Teacher.

CLEAN. Clean your clothes, skin, and hair if you suspect they have picked up asbestos fibres. Don't simply dust yourself off, as this will spread the fibres. Use a wet cloth to remove visible contamination and ensure these are disposed of as asbestos waste.

CLOSE. You or another member of staff should close off the area / prevent entry and put-up warning signs. Your school premises / leadership team will then decide what to do with the contaminated area.