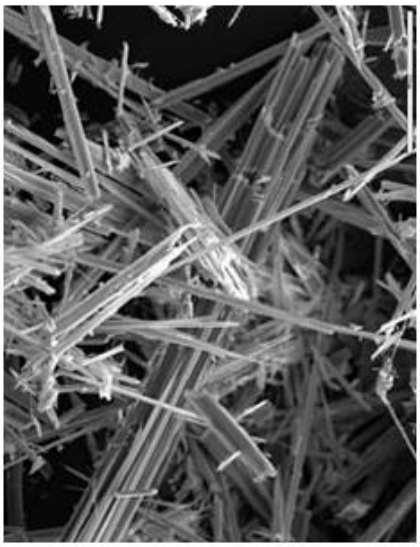
Charities
Safety
Group

Asbestos

Background

Asbestos is a naturally occurring mineral fibre. When used as building material it can have properties such as good tensile strengths, resistance to corrosion, fire resistance and insulation. As a result of this it was used extensively throughout the UK, in various building products, until it was banned in 1999.



Asbestos fibres magnified

Photo: Cold Truth

Exposure to airborne asbestos fibres has been shown to cause certain asbestos diseases, such as mesothelioma, asbestosis and pleural thickening. It is often overlooked as a health and safety issue because the ill health effects from exposure to asbestos fibres are not immediate, but have a long latency period. In some cases, it can be up to 40 years after exposure before a disease presents.

When it is in good condition and left undisturbed, the risks are lower. They increase when asbestos is in area that is used frequently where it could be damaged, or if either maintenance, refurbishment, or demolition take place. If your building was built after November 1999 (when asbestos was banned) it is extremely unlikely it will contain any asbestos.

Legislation

In the UK the main relevant pieces of legislation for this topic are the Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012 (England, Scotland and Wales) and the Control of Asbestos (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2012 (Northern Ireland).

Airborne asbestos fibres released from pipe lagging

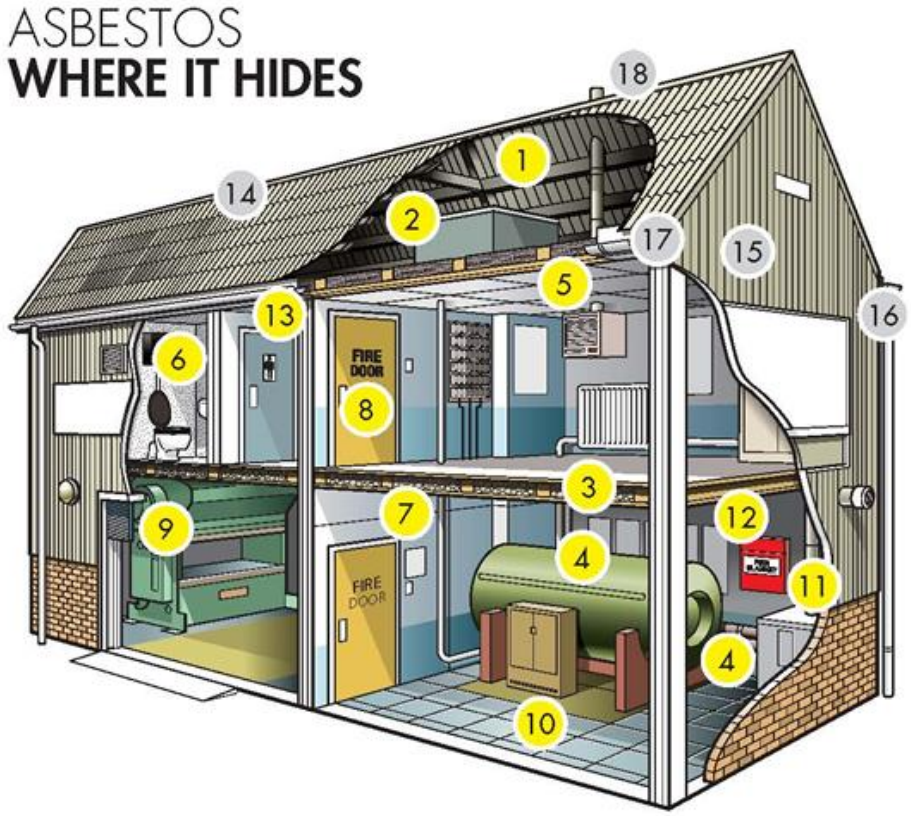
Photo: Asbestos Management Centre

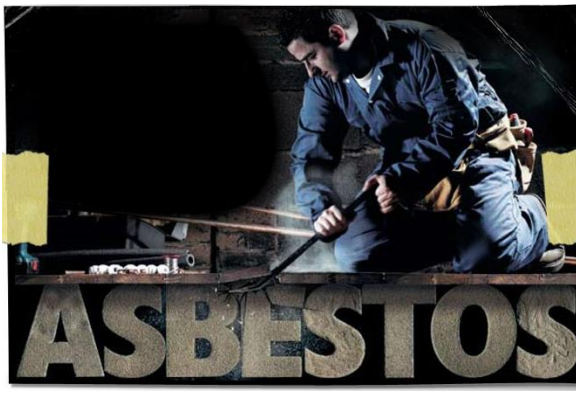
The HSE have produced detailed and helpful guidance for this legislation in the form of an approved code of practice, called 'managing and working with asbestos'. In a much simpler format the HSE have a frequently asked questions page relating to asbestos. This helpfully answers most basic questions a charity may have on controlling asbestos at work, signposting off to other sources of information. The HSE also have a wealth of other guidance on their dedicated asbestos webpages and an online step by step tool to work through to help you comply with the 'duty to manage' asbestos within your building.

Members of the Charities Safety Group via its website can also access some asbestos guidance documents.

Key Requirements

Some of the key requirements relating to asbestos are shown in the table below:

Key Requirement	**Content of requirement**
Asbestos management plan and policy	An asbestos management plan is a document which details how an organisation will manage the risks from asbestos containing materials (ACMs) in their building, such as who has responsibilities, training requirements, monitoring asbestos on site, contingency arrangements, etc. Commonly this is contained within or links to an asbestos policy that details your organisations overall approach to managing the risks from asbestos containing materials.
Locating asbestos within your building and checking its condition	This can be achieved through an asbestos survey being carried out by a competent surveyor. In some cases it can be achieved through checking historical records about the construction of the building i.e. if it was not used in the original construction, was removed following a previous survey or the property was built after 2000.  *Potential asbestos locations in a commercial building* Illustration: HSE There are several types of survey, and it is important to make sure the one carried out is relevant for your needs. For example a 'management' survey would not be appropriate or in-depth enough if major building or renovation works were to take place, when a 'refurbishment and demolition survey' would be needed.

	A survey, or locating the asbestos within your building, should not be a one off. Instead regular (normally at least annually) formal and recorded checks should be carried out on the asbestos within your building. This can either be by a contractor or it could be done in house, by someone who has been appropriately trained (in asbestos awareness). This is commonly recorded on an 'Asbestos Management Plan', which the HSE have information and examples on their website. Once located and where possible, it is good practice to label ACMs in your building, unless there is good justification for not doing so. *Asbestos label* Image: HSE
Asbestos awareness training for any staff or volunteers who may disturb asbestos	The regulations place a legal duty on employers to provide information, instruction and training (IIT) to any of their employees who are likely to be exposed to asbestos as part of their work. IIT for asbestos awareness is intended to give workers and supervisors the information they need to avoid work that may disturb asbestos during any normal work which could disturb the fabric of a building, or other item which might contain asbestos. It will not prepare workers to carry out work with ACMs. If any work is to be carried out where ACMs will be disturbed, specialist contractors should be used.
Contractor management	 *Visual representation of how contractors are exposed to risk from asbestos* *Photo: HSE* Robust procedures are needed to ensure that contractors and people doing work on the fabric of the building are made aware of ACMs on site. It would be good practice to require these people to sign and confirm they have seen this information. This should be monitored to ensure that it is followed.

Unique Challenges

When considering how to manage asbestos effectively, there are some specific considerations needed based on typical charity settings, including:

- Volunteers, their friends or relatives carrying out uncontrolled or unauthorised maintenance work.
- A lack of communication and control of contractors by volunteers.
- Problems with a lack of good communication and cooperation between landlords and charities who are their tenants about asbestos issues.