

Circumstances where asbestos may be found

Asbestos can be found:

- in ceiling tiles;
- on corrugated asbestos roofs;
- in downpipes from gutters;
- in insulation around pipes;
- as sprayed asbestos around structural beams of buildings;
- in electrical panels;
- in internal walls; and
- in textured paints.

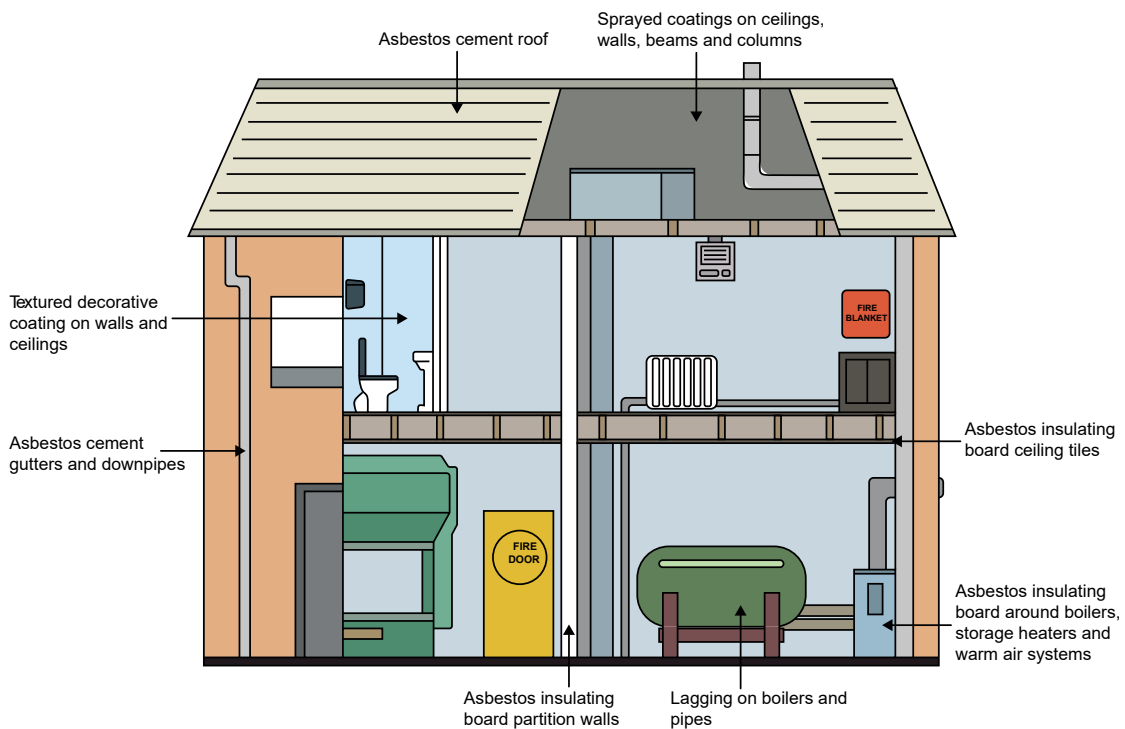


Figure 1: Where asbestos hides¹

Although the use of asbestos is banned in some countries (for example the United Kingdom), it is still a global issue, with production estimates for asbestos-containing materials at around 2.03 million tonnes per year on average.² Countries such as Russia, China, India, Indonesia and Kazakhstan still mine, produce or import asbestos.³ The use of asbestos in these countries is typically within construction, textiles, brake pads and insulation.⁴

Even in countries where the use of asbestos is banned, asbestos is still likely to be present in older buildings. That means it is likely to be encountered by anyone who disturbs, renovates, maintains or alters parts of buildings. For example, an organisation may wish to knock down an internal partition wall in an old building. This could cause considerable release of asbestos fibres.

Due to the hazardous nature of the material and the strict regulations governing its handling, specialist contractors are typically employed to remove asbestos. These professionals are specially trained and certified to carry out asbestos removal safely, using controlled procedures and protective equipment to minimise exposure.

KEY POINTS

- Asbestos can be found in places like ceiling tiles, corrugated roofs and in textured paints. The three main health conditions resulting from exposure are asbestosis, lung cancer and mesothelioma.
- Sewage workers, refuse workers and paramedics are some of the occupations at risk of contracting a blood-borne virus. Precautions include immunisation where possible, wearing appropriate PPE, covering all cuts with waterproof dressings and correct use and disposal of sharps.
- Exposure to exhaust fumes presents a significant risk of exposure to carbon monoxide and using carbon monoxide alarms is important.
- Cement is hazardous both in powdered form and as wet cement.
- Two key situations where *Legionella* bacteria may proliferate are stagnant water being present and situations where water temperature is in the range of 20–45°C.
- Following good hygiene procedures is a key control measure to avoid contracting leptospirosis.
- Exposure to respirable crystalline silica (RCS) can cause diseases such as lung cancer and COPD, which are likely to cause irreversible health effects. Minimising exposure to RCS is crucial to minimise health risks.
- Exposure to wood dust can cause respiratory disease and nasal cancer. Reduction of exposure to the dust is an important control measure.

Reference

¹Adapted from: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/asbestos/diagrams.htm>

²International Labour Organization, 'Asbestos: limitless, endless contamination – with complete impunity' (19 March 2019) (<https://www.ilo.org/resource/statement/asbestos-limitless-endless-contamination-%E2%80%93-complete-impunity>)

³Asbestos.com, 'Mesothelioma & Asbestos Worldwide' (last updated 2 July 2026) (<https://www.asbestos.com/mesothelioma/worldwide/>)

⁴International Labour Organization, 'Recognizing the dangers of asbestos' (8 May 2019) (<https://www.ilo.org/resource/news/recognizing-dangers-asbestos>)

Page 487 correction

Correction to structural measures content for chapter "10.2 Preventing fire and fire spread"

The fourth sentence of the paragraph under the "Steel" heading should read:

"An unprotected steel frame will begin to deform at a temperature of around 600 °C, which severely compromises the structural integrity of the building and can also contribute to a partial or even total collapse of the building."

Page 492 correction

Correction to flame detectors content for chapter "10.3: Fire alarms and fire fighting"

The final two sentences under the "Flame detectors" heading should read:

"Flame detectors use ultraviolet or infrared sensors (or a combination of both) to identify specific wavelengths of light emitted by flames. When the receiving unit detects flames, the alarm is sounded or the suppression unit is activated."