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Asbestos

At least 3500 people in Great Britain die each year from mesothelioma and asbestos related lung cancer as a result of past exposure to asbestos. Annual numbers of deaths are predicted to go on rising into the next decade.

Analyses of mesothelioma deaths indicate that many deaths are due to heavy asbestos exposures in industries like shipbuilding and railway engineering in the past. If current control measures are not adhered to, asbestos removal workers are now potentially at the highest risk, as are workers involved in the refurbishment, repair or maintenance of buildings - such as plumbers, carpenters and electricians.

Asbestos still kills!

Asbestos was used extensively as a building material in GB from the 1950s through to the mid 1980s. Although some of this material has been removed over the years, there are many thousands of tonnes of asbestos still present in buildings. It is estimated that over half a million non-domestic premises currently have some form of asbestos in them.

There is extensive repair and removal work, which will continue for the foreseeable future.

This information leaflet will be of particular interest to employers, contractors and workers involved in the building trades, such as plumbers, carpenters and electricians and for anyone else who may come into contact with asbestos material during their work, for example, computer installers, cabling engineers.

What is it ?

Asbestos is a naturally occurring mineral, mined in Australia, Canada and South Africa during the 20th century. Its heat and sound resistant properties made it ideal for use in the manufacture of a wide range of products from pipe insulation, flooring materials, cement roofing and insulatory coatings to toilet cisterns, artex wall coatings and its wide range of use has resulted in asbestos now being present in some form in all but the newest of premises – its use was only completely prohibited in 1999.

Asbestos is a **Class One carcinogen** but is only dangerous when the



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microscopic fibres are released into the air and breathed in. There is usually a long delay between the first exposure to asbestos dust and the onset of disease. This can be between 15 and 60 years, with the majority of people dying from asbestos related diseases now being exposed during the 50s and 60s.

Asbestos-related diseases, such as **mesothelioma, asbestosis** and **lung cancer**, currently kill over 3500 people each year in the UK. This figure is expected to rise to in excess of 10,000 per annum over the next ten years.

The danger from asbestos arises when the material is damaged or moved. Asbestos fibres may be released and breathed in, settling in the lungs of maintenance workers, plumbers, builders or whoever is in the area.

It is therefore vitally important to be aware of the location of asbestos-containing materials within the workplace so that the potential of disturbance and fibre release can be prevented.

The **Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations 2002** places an explicit duty on those responsible for

workplace safety in relation to asbestos.

The responsibility lies with the Duty Holder, who is defined as;

- Every person who has, by virtue of a contract or tenancy, an obligation of any extent in relation to the maintenance or repair of non-domestic premises or any means of access to or from such premises.
- Where there is no contract or tenancy every person who has control of that part of the non-domestic premises or any means of access to or from such premises.
- Where there is more than one dutyholder, the relative contribution to be made by each such person in complying with the requirements of this regulation will be determined by the nature and extent of the maintenance and repair obligation owed by that person.

Any duty holder must now:-

- Take reasonable steps to determine the location and nature of asbestos and presumed asbestos materials
- Keep and regularly update a register of the location, condition,



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maintenance and removal of all asbestos materials.

- Manage all aspects of asbestos materials that are to remain in place by means of a management plan.
- Inform anyone who is likely to disturb asbestos containing material about its location and condition.

The HSE publication MDHS-100 sets out the methodology for surveying any premises for asbestos-containing materials (ACMs). It defines three types of asbestos survey;

Type 1: Location and Assessment Survey

The purpose of the survey is to locate the presence and extent of any ACMs in the premises, where reasonably practical, whilst deferring the need for sampling and analysis until a later time. Our survey report would provide assessment on any material which is presumed to contain asbestos. The duty holder would therefore bear the potential cost of the management of some non asbestos containing materials.

Type 2: Standard Sampling, Identification and Assessment Survey

The purpose and procedures in this survey are the same as for Type 1, except that representative samples of materials suspected of containing asbestos are taken. The samples are then analysed by a UKAS accredited laboratory and the results used to compile a register of the ACMs within the premises. The condition of each ACM is assessed and recommendations made regarding their management.

Type 3: Full Access Sampling and Identification Survey

This survey may involve destructive inspection to gain access to all areas and is designed to be used as a basis for tendering the removal of ACMs from the premises prior to demolition or major refurbishment work. Samples are taken and analysed by a UKAS accredited laboratory but the survey does not assess the condition of the asbestos, other than to note areas of damage or where additional asbestos debris may be expected to be present.

Each Survey Report Pack includes;

- An asbestos register of ACMs
- Colour photographs of sampling points
- Site plans indicating each sampling



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point

- A certificate of analysis from a UKAS accredited laboratory
- A CD with the full report in PDF format

TCH Safety Consultants are based in the South West.

All of our surveyors are qualified to carry out Type 1, 2 and Type 3 asbestos surveys and have accumulated thousands of hours of experience in surveying.

All our surveyors have P402 and P405 qualifications. All our work strictly follows the methodology presented in MDHS-100, the HSE document 'Surveying, sampling and assessment of asbestos-containing materials'.

Safety is no accident