

LEARNING ABOUT THE RISKS OF ASBESTOS
This brochure will teach you what risks are involved in handling materials containing asbestos.
DON'T WORK with materials if you don't know whether they contain asbestos!

EXPOSURE TO ASBESTOS FIBRES can occur when asbestos-containing materials (ACM) are handled in such a way that the materials' structure is destroyed. Companies and workers specialising in removing asbestos have all the know-how and skills needed to deal with ACM. But also workers in many other construction firms, in particular those carrying out renovation works, may encounter situations and/or materials that could unintentionally expose them to ACM.

These information modules have been developed to cater mainly for the needs of that second group by the European Federation of Building and Wood Workers (EFBWW) and the European Construction Industry Federation (FIEC), the EU sectoral social partners for the construction industry, in collaboration with health and safety organisations in various EU Member States.

Targeted user-friendly information sheets have been developed for each of the main materials containing asbestos, so as to provide guidance to companies and workers. They use a traffic-light model which distinguishes between three risk situations:

- ☐ the work can be undertaken applying the standard precautionary and protective measures;
- ☒ the work can only be undertaken if specific protective measures are taken;
- ☐ the work requires the intervention of a specialist company.

The project partners have drawn on their experience and expertise to devise the various information modules, adopting the safest approach in each case. However, the guidance given here is only indicative and each situation must also be evaluated in light of the national legislation, which differs significantly in some instances from one country to the other.

www.efbww.org
www.fiec.eu
www.bgbau.de
www.suva.ch
www.auva.at
www.ffc.constructive.be
www.bygud.dk

Detecting asbestos and taking appropriate action

ASBESTOS
INFORMATION
MODULES

TOOL
BOX



ASBESTOS
INFORMATION
MODULES

TOOL
BOX

The main materials containing asbestos



Asbestos cement



Window putty



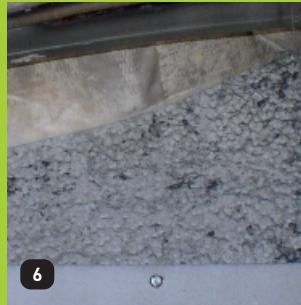
Floor coverings



Adhesives, plasters, fillers



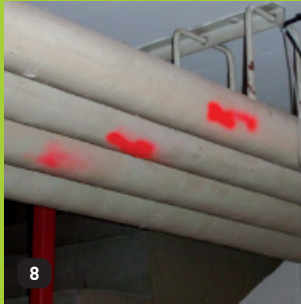
Asbestos panels



Sprayed asbestos



Loose asbestos lagging



Fireproof coverings for ventilation, chutes and storage heaters



Insulation for pipe ducts against fire, heat and cold

OBJECTIVES To ensure that workers and their supervisors know the dangers associated with asbestos and how to act appropriately and that they consistently follow the rules they have been taught.

TARGET GROUPS The target groups for these information modules are foremen, group leaders, safety representatives, company owners and employees (Flyer) and also training institutes and other training providers. The estimated length of each instruction session is approximately 15 minutes. Instruction sessions can be held in the workplace.

European Federation
of Building
and Woodworkers



European Social Partners
of the Construction Industry



With financial support
from the European Union

What is asbestos and where is it found?

Asbestos denotes a group of mineral fibres that occur in certain rocks, and it stands out from other materials because of its resistant, fibrous structure.

- The properties of asbestos include:
- heat resistance up to 1,000°C;
 - resistance to many aggressive chemicals;
 - good electrical and thermal insulating properties;
 - high elasticity and tensile strength;
 - can be easily incorporated into various binding materials.

These unique properties meant that in the past asbestos was used for many construction applications and can still commonly be found in buildings today.

Firmly bound
(asbestos fibres firmly incorporated into composites)

- Asbestos cement products in surface construction and civil engineering (façades, corrugated sheets and pressure and sewer pipes)
- Formware such as flower boxes and brake and clutch facings (resin composite)
- Flange seals (rubber composite)

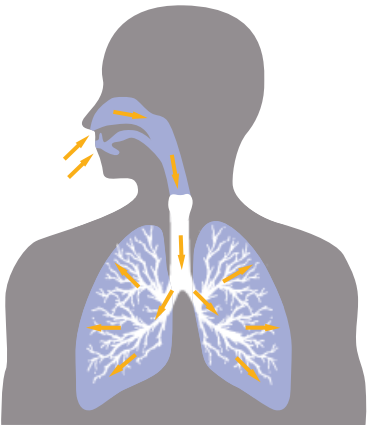
Loosely bound
(asbestos fibres in a loose composite with other materials)

- Insulating material for thermal insulation and fire protection (e.g. spray asbestos coatings, asbestos lightweight boards)
- Back coating of floor coverings
- Pipe insulation
- Electrical appliances and older power distribution units

Pure form

- Cords, textiles, fillers

Asbestos and health hazards



How can asbestos get into the body?
Asbestos is dangerous when it is inhaled. Even low concentrations of asbestos dust in the atmosphere can cause very serious illness.

Why is asbestos dangerous?
Asbestos fibres have a crystalline structure. When they are handled mechanically, the fibres split lengthwise into increasingly fine fibrils, which can be spread over a large area. If they are inhaled during handling, it is difficult for the body to break them down or get rid of them.

What diseases can asbestos cause?
In the years they stay in the lung tissue, asbestos fibres can cause various serious illnesses such as asbestosis, mesothelioma, bronchial cancer, pleural plaques and lung cancer. Therefore exposure to airborne asbestos fibres must be kept down to a minimum.

Latency period
All asbestos-related illnesses have a long latency period (usually between 15 and 45 years from the start of exposure). The risk rises with both the length of exposure and its intensity.

Legal basis

The European "Framework" Directive **(89/391/EC)** on Safety and Health at work sets up some legal requirements for employers and employees:

Key areas of responsibility for employers:

- Determine whether the construction materials contain asbestos.
- Establish the risk level and lay down occupational health and safety measures.
- Draw up a work plan.
- Compile instructions for carrying out the work and provide training for workers.

Key areas of responsibility for workers:

- Follow their employer's instructions.
- Use the personal protective equipment (PPE) required for workers.
- Inform the employer immediately if a suspect material is found during the works.

Key areas of responsibility for clients:

- The client should always appoint a safety-coordinator when 2 or more companies are working together
- A comprehensive plan for health and safety should be made and revised
- The client must define safety precautions in common areas of a construction site, including refurbishing or demolition projects.

NATIONAL REGULATIONS:
When handling asbestos, national rules will always prevail over these information modules. Contact the relevant authorities if you are in doubt whether these information modules are in line with your national asbestos regulations.

Establishing the risk level

Before starting work involving asbestos-containing materials, the risk level must be established and the appropriate measures planned and implemented. The risk level depends on the condition in which the material is found (firmly bound, weakly bound, damaged or not damaged).

These information modules will help you evaluate the risks of various types of work with different materials.

Here is the definition of the risk levels used in this manual:

Activities involving little or no risk:
The work can be carried out without delay but with the appropriate caution. This means that dust is neither created nor dispersed.

Activities involving an increased risk:
A high level of fibre release has to be anticipated. The work must be performed only if appropriate measures are taken.

Activities involving a very high risk:
A very high level of fibre release has to be anticipated. Ask about the conditions and measures required for such work. These can be obtained from your supervisor.

Appropriate protective equipment



Respiratory protection
This must be appropriate to the risk (at least P3).



Prevent the spread of asbestos dust
Disposable protective clothing (at least PPE Category 3 Type 5/6)



Vacuum dust at the source
Industrial vacuum cleaner featuring H-filter*, with an additional asbestos requirement as per EN 60335-2-69

* applies in some countries