Frequently Asked Questions – Website

1. What is asbestos?

Asbestos is the name given to a group of fibrous minerals which occur naturally in the earth. These are grouped into two mineral types known as serpentine and amphibole.

The most common types of asbestos fibre used are chrysotile (white) asbestos which is a serpentine mineral and amosite (brown), and crocidolite (blue) asbestos which are amphibole minerals. The colours are seen in clean fibres and may not be clearly visible when the fibres are mixed with other material.

Asbestos was widely used in buildings, vehicles and domestic and industrial items because of its chemical and physical properties of high tensile strength, flexibility, chemical and heat resistance and good thermal and electrical insulation properties.

2. Health Effects

Asbestos disease is caused by breathing in very fine fibres. As asbestos fibres accumulate in the lungs, several types of disease may occur.

Asbestosis: - is a scarring of the lung tissue caused by breathing in asbestos fibre over a period of many years. This leads to a progressive loss of elasticity and lung function. It is a slowly developing disease with a latency period (time between exposure and onset of disease) of 15 to 20 years.

Mesothelioma: - is a cancer of the lining of the lungs (pleura) or more rarely of the lining of the abdominal cavity (peritoneum). Mesothelioma has a long latency period, averaging between 35 to 40 years; however this may vary between 15 and 67 years. The disease is almost always associated with asbestos exposure.

Lung Cancer: - is a malignant tumour of the bronchi of the lungs. The tumour grows through the surrounding tissue, invading and often obstructing passages.

Individuals exposed to asbestos have an increased risk of developing lung cancer which is further increased by smoking. Again the disease has a long latency period of approximately 20 years.

Diffuse Pleural Thickening: - is a non-malignant disease in which the lining of the lungs (pleura) become scarred. Pleural plaques do not normally cause impairment of lung function or associated disability.

The risk of developing an asbestos disease is related to the type of asbestos, and, the duration and level of exposure. Mesothelioma is more likely to be associated with crocidolite and amosite than with chrysotile

Further information can be found in Health and Safety Executive Guidance MS13, Asbestos: Medical Guidance Note.

EMAS the Employment Medical Advisory Service provide expert advice on medical matters.
Contact No. 028 90 408007 e-mail: emas.hseni@detini.gov.uk

3. How can I tell if I have asbestos in my house?

Asbestos products were widely used in building materials, including insulation and fire protection. Items that may have contained asbestos in the past include:

Asbestos cement products- used for roofing materials, roof tiles, guttering and soffit boards.

Insulation board- used for fire protection, thermal and acoustic insulation and can be found internally as partitions, wall linings and ceiling materials.

PVC flooring and vinyl floor tiles- some products contained asbestos or were backed with asbestos containing paper.

Asbestos is only a risk to health if the fibres become airborne and are breathed into the lungs. Asbestos containing products that are in good condition do not represent a significant risk unless they are damaged or abraded, and should be left undisturbed.

You cannot tell if a product contains asbestos just by looking at it. If you need to work on or around any materials that you think may contain asbestos you should have a sample of the material analysed before you carry out any work.

Taking the sample yourself is not recommended as there is risk of fibre release during the sampling process. You should employ a competent person to take a sample of the material and have it analysed by a UKAS accredited laboratory. If you do take a sample yourself, ensure that the material is dampened (use water with washing-up liquid) and that you do not create dust or allow the spread of the material. Clean up afterwards using a damp rag and include the rag with the sample. Seal the broken edge with paint or other sealant. Contact your chosen laboratory to arrange delivery. There will normally be a charge

for this service. You can find details of accredited laboratories on the UKAS website at www.ukas.org/testing.

4 What should I do if I have asbestos in my house?

This will depend on the type and condition of the asbestos containing material (ACM). Asbestos fibre is safe provided that it remains bonded within the material in which it is used and that the fibre does not become airborne. THERE IS NO DANGER unless fibres are released and inhaled into the lungs.

Generally material in good condition will not release asbestos fibres.

If the ACM is in good condition and unlikely to be disturbed it can be left in place. You should check its condition regularly for signs of deterioration.

If the ACM is in poor condition, or becomes damaged, or if you are going to make changes in your home that might disturb it, then you will need to have it repaired or removed.

The person who does this work should be competent to work with asbestos. Contractors must comply with the Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations (NI) 2003. If the work involves asbestos insulation, asbestos insulation board or sprayed coating, the contractor must also be licensed under the Asbestos Licensing Regulations (NI) 1984.

A list of Contractors Licensed to work with asbestos is available on the HSENI website.

5. How do I get rid of asbestos waste?

ACM's are classified as 'Hazardous Waste' and must not be disposed of with household waste. The material should be double wrapped in labelled polythene sacks or sheeting before they are transported for disposal at a licensed waste disposal site.

The Environmental Services department of your local council may provide a collection service for ACM's, or arrange for a licensed waste carrier to collect the material for transportation to a licensed waste disposal site, on your behalf.

A charge may be made for this service.

Alternatively consult the local commercial telephone directory under *"Waste Disposal Services"* to arrange collection of the material by a licensed waste carrier for transportation to a licensed waste disposal site. A charge will be made for this service.

Some asbestos removal contractors may undertake disposal of small amounts

of asbestos material for house holders. Again, you should consult the local commercial telephone directory

6. What regulations cover work with asbestos?

The Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations [CAWR] (NI) 2003 apply to all work activity with ACM's.

The regulations are supported by three 'Approved Code of Practice and Guidance' (ACOP)

Work with asbestos which does not normally require a license L27 HSE Books ISBN 0 7176-2562-1.

Work with asbestos insulation, asbestos coating and asbestos insulating board L28 HSE Books ISBN 0 7176-2563-X.

The management of asbestos in non-domestic premises L127 HSE Books ISBN 0 7176 2382 3.

The Approved Code of Practice give practical advice on how to comply with the Regulations.
If you follow the advice, you will be doing enough to comply with the Regulations.

7. Can I reuse asbestos cement?

The Asbestos (Prohibitions) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000 prohibits the **supply** of asbestos products.

Supply is defined as the sale, lease, hire, hire-purchase, loan, gift or an exchange for a consideration other than money.

This means that all forms of asbestos and products which have had asbestos added to them during manufacture, cannot be supplied for re-use.

Where asbestos materials were in place before 2 May 2000 they can remain provided they are in good condition and properly managed.

8. Should I avoid buying a house that contains some asbestos material?

When buying a house, there are many factors you need to consider, including condition, location, price as well as the presence of ACM. There are a number of factors which you should consider:

What type of asbestos product is it?
Where is the asbestos material?

Is it in good repair?
Is it accessible to the occupants?
Can it become damaged?
Can I prevent damage?
Cost of removal and disposal now or in future?

Asbestos cement is considered a low risk material provided that it remains in good condition. The asbestos fibres are tightly bound in the cement matrix and will not be released unless it becomes badly damaged or broken. Other low risk materials include asbestos-containing vinyl floor tiles and textured paint, if they are in good condition.

Sprayed asbestos, thermal insulation on pipe work, asbestos ropes and packing, insulation boards and ceiling tiles all contain a higher percentage of asbestos. The fibres are not as tightly bound in the matrix and there is a higher risk of them becoming airborne, particularly if the material becomes damaged.

Details on asbestos products can be found in Health and Safety Executive Guidance MDHS 100.

9. I think I have been exposed to asbestos. What should I do?

Recently published research suggests that single or low level exposures are very unlikely to lead to disease and the risks with such an exposure are considered "insignificant". Disease associated with asbestos exposure occurs through breathing in asbestos fibre as dust. The chance of developing a disease is related to the amount of fibre inhaled and the duration of exposure. If you think you may have been exposed, you may wish to discuss your concerns with your doctor. At this stage a full medical examination or x-ray would not be beneficial since it takes many years for the effects of asbestos to appear.

If you have been accidentally exposed to asbestos in your place of work, as a result of a fibre release, your employers must investigate the incident and must report it the Health & Safety Executive NI.

If you work with asbestos and your exposure is likely to exceed the action level then your employer is required to ensure that you are under adequate medical surveillance by an Appointed Doctor. This can be arranged through EMAS the Employment Medical Advisory Service.
Contact No. 028 90 408007 e-mail: emas.hseni@detini.gov.uk.

Your employer has other duties under the Control of Asbestos at Work (NI) Regulations 2003.

Further information can be found in Health and Safety Executive MS13 Asbestos: Medical Guidance Note.

10. How do I find out about Licensed Contractors?

All work involving asbestos insulation, asbestos insulation board and sprayed coating must be carried out by a contractor licensed under the Asbestos Licensing Regulations (NI) 1984, as amended.

HSENI is the licensing authority under these Regulations.

A list of licensed asbestos removal Contractors is available from the Health and Safety Executive, 83 Ladas Drive, Belfast, BT6 9FR
Phone 028 90243249 e mail asbestos@detini.gsi.gov.uk