



# SAIF Health & Safety Briefing Note

November 2015

## How to safely deal with the dangers of asbestos

Thanks to Simon Bloxham, Health & Safety Strategist for Safety for Business

This is one of the most common questions I receive from new clients. Let's face it, there is a cost to a survey, and if you don't need to do it, then why should you? The important thing, then, is to establish whether you need it.

### Does my building contain asbestos?

You would be amazed at just how much asbestos was used within building work in the past. Any premises built before 1999 could contain it so, if you are unsure, then presume that it does. Some of the most common examples are Artexed or textured ceiling tiles, floor tiles, fire-resisting products, corrugated cement roofs and walls.

### Who is responsible?

The person responsible is the duty holder. Specifically, the duty holder is any person responsible for maintaining and repairing all or part of the property, or who has control over the building. This could be the occupier, landlord or owner. According to the law, the duty holder must:

- Find out whether the building contains asbestos and what condition it is in
- Assess the risk of the asbestos releasing fibres
- Make a plan to manage the risk

### So what is the answer?

As I see it, if your premises were built before the year 2000 and contain some of those tell-tale signs, like Artexed ceilings, then the answer is yes, you do need to get a survey done.

**But I know the premises and am certain there is no asbestos present.**

If you are confident that it does not contain any asbestos then you can forego the survey, but remain cautious.

You should write a statement explaining that the building appears to be free from asbestos but, to be safe, before any building work takes place, you will examine the building again. If there is the slightest suspicion that asbestos might be present on examination, you will then avoid carrying out the work until a specialist is brought in to confirm whether it is or not.

### Did you know?

Asbestos is a natural product and is still mined today in Russia, China, Brazil and Kazakhstan. Up until 2011, that list included Canada. Two million tonnes of asbestos are mined each year. We have used asbestos for over 5,000 years. It has been used to make false snow on film sets, cigarette filters and even toothpaste.

One person dies every five hours from mesothelioma ( just one disease you can develop from working with asbestos). It is estimated that, as a direct result of exposure to asbestos, around 91,000 deaths will have occurred in the UK by 2050.

You cannot be too careful, of



course, and my recommendation is that, if in any doubt, carry out the survey. You should also shop around when doing so, as the difference in cost can be noticeable.

Make sure, though, that whoever is going to do the survey is qualified to do so. To do this, simply ask for their UKAS accreditation certificate and check the UKAS database.

**Help is at hand! As a member of SAIF:**

You can talk to a safety professional at OSS free of charge simply by calling 08456 344164.

You are also entitled to a discount on our fees when OSS helps you with your health and safety needs. We can also visit you to see how you are doing when it comes to compliance, free of charge apart from travel costs. So what do you have to lose?

Talk to a safety professional by calling **01462 488236**.