201: Health and safety in building services engineering  
**Handout 14: Asbestos**

**Learning outcome**

The learner will:

1. Understand the requirements for identifying and dealing with hazards in the work environment

**Assessment Criteria**

4.7 The explain situations **where asbestos may be encountered**.

4.8 specify the procedures for dealing with the suspected presence of asbestos in the workplace.

**Range**

**Where asbestos may be encountered**: In decorative finishes (aertex, plaster, floor tiles), In accessories (flash guards and matting in fuse carriers and on distribution board covers), In insulation storage compartments vessels and pipework.

**Asbestos**

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| **What is asbestos?**  Asbestos is a fibrous material that is opencast mined from the ground. Asbestos is naturally occurring and deposits can be found in most countries around the world.  There are three main types of asbestos you may come across: chrysolite, amosite and crocidolite.  **How does it get into your body?**  The body will get rid of most large fibres that enter via the nose and mouth, however tiny fibres can pass into lower parts of the lung. They stay there for years and in some cases work through the lung lining.  Asbestos cannot be absorbed through your skin. |  |

**What are the effects of asbestos?**

Breathing in asbestos fibres can lead to diseases, such lung cancer, mesothelioma and asbestosis. The delay between first exposure and the start of the disease can vary from 15 to 60 years. The majority of people now dying from asbestos-related diseases were exposed during the 1950s and 1960s.

Asbestos is no longer used, but it was used extensively in the construction industry in the past, particularly in homes built or refurbished between 1950 and 1980.

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| Workers in building maintenance and refurbishment trades come into contact with asbestos frequently.  Since it was often mixed with materials such as cement, it is not always easy to identify asbestos.  Asbestos was used in a variety of applications, including:   * In decorative finishes (aertex, plaster, floor tiles) * In accessories (flash guards and matting in fuse carriers and on distribution board covers) * In insulation storage compartments, vessels and pipework. |  |

**What do I do if I suspect asbestos?**

* If you are in any doubt about whether the material you are working with contains asbestos, **stop work** and find out.
* Assume that anything that looks like asbestos **is** asbestos.
* The person in charge of the job must investigate whether there is any asbestos on site.

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| **Do**   * Keep asbestos-containing materials damp whilst you work on them. * Only use hand tools. * Use PPE, including a respirator – a dust mask will not provide adequate protection. * Clean up as you go along; don’t pile up waste. * Use a special ‘Type H’ vacuum cleaner. * Always wash your hands and face if you take a break and at the end of the day. |  | **Don’t**   * Use power tools, as they create more dust. * Take home overalls to wash – use only the disposable type. * Eat or drink in the work area. * Smoke, as the risk of lung cancer from asbestos is higher among smokers. |

**What do I do if I’m in charge?**

* Prevent exposure to asbestos or reduce it to the lowest level possible by using suitable control methods.
* Ban the use of power tools.
* Dampen the material.
* Enclose the work and use dust extraction equipment.
* Identify the area of concern.

**How should asbestos be disposed of?**

Asbestos is **hazardous waste**; it must be packaged and labelled as such and taken to a licensed waste disposal site.