

Asbestos in the home

Advice for Harlow Council tenants



Asbestos Information

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Asbestos in the home

During the time much of the town's housing was built, materials containing asbestos were extensively used by the construction industry. Asbestos is also present in many buildings built or refurbished before 2000.

There are asbestos-containing materials in about 5.5 million buildings in the UK. Because asbestos has been so widely used, there is a low level of asbestos fibres in the air everywhere. Yet the risk to the public from asbestos in the home is low. The greatest risk arises when asbestos is damaged, drilled, sawn, scrubbed or sanded. DIY work can result in brief but high levels of exposure.

This leaflet provides Harlow Council tenants with advice on living with asbestos and information on how the Council manages asbestos in its homes.

Our simple advice is:

- Don't panic if you think you have asbestos in your home - it's usually only a problem if it's disturbed or damaged.
- Don't drill, saw, sand, scrape or disturb materials that contain asbestos.
- Do not dust, sweep or vacuum debris that may contain asbestos.
- Always contact the Council for advice and permission before carrying out any home improvements.

Please read this leaflet for advice and information. You can find further advice and information at: www.harlow.gov.uk/housing-asbestos

What is Asbestos

Asbestos is a natural mineral found in rocks around the world and mined for its strength, flexibility and stability. It has been used commercially for over 150 years. Asbestos fibres can cause lung problems if breathed in, with mesothelioma and asbestosis the most commonly attributed illnesses.

Where asbestos could be found?

Since 1999 the use of asbestos in commercially available products has been banned. Here are some of the asbestos-containing products that might be found in a home:

External Structure

- Roofing felt made with bitumen.
- Corrugated roofing sheets – for sheds and garages.
- Flat cladding sheets with or without an aggregate finish.
- Flat roof decking tiles – modular tiles used as a walking surface to spread the load on flat roofs.
- Profiled metal sheeting coated with asbestos fibres in bitumen.
- Rainwater downpipes and guttering.
- Roof cladding – numerous brands and types.
- Roof slates and tiles.
- Roofing sheets – corrugated for sheds and garages.
- Soil and vent pipes.
- Undercloak – board supporting roof tiles where they overhang beyond brickwork. This is usually found on the end of a house.
- Wall cladding sheets (plain and decorative).
- Window boxes for flowers.
- Soffit boards – horizontal board beneath the roof overhang which bridges the gap between brickwork and fascia board with the guttering attached.
- Window sills.

Internal structure

- Airbricks.
- Bath panels.

- Bituminous paper lining to the roof.
- Bituminous acoustic pad fitted beneath stainless steel sinks.
- Chimney breasts – cement panels used to form mock chimney breasts in timber-framed homes.
- Cold water tanks in the loft space.
- Decorative ceiling tiles.
- Floor finish – cushion floor sheet vinyl.
- Floor tiles – rigid and thermoplastic vinyl.
- Fire surrounds – heat and fireproof.
- Flue pipes to heating systems.
- Insulation of warm air heating and central heating systems.
- Partition sheets or wallboard (rarely used in domestic properties).
- Lagging to pipes and boilers.
- Sprayed asbestos coatings – rarely used in standard domestic properties, more likely to be found in large blocks of flats or steel-framed buildings.
- Textured decorative finishings to ceilings and occasionally walls ('Artex' is a well-known brand).
- Textured decorative paint.
- Window sills – black cast resin sheet from the manufacturer Eternit.
- Wall boarding to internal partitions, airing cupboard linings, shelving, duct and pipe covers.

Other places

- Catalytic heaters – heaters that use gas in conjunction with a concealed flame to produce radiant infrared energy. The flameless type up to 1988 normally contains an asbestos panel.
- Coals and fake ash – in early 'coal-effect' gas fires.

- Coal bunkers – lids and slider panels to coal holes.
- Electric storage heaters – up to 1976, used for the heat retention blocks.
- Filler ropes surrounding oven doors and solid fuel fires.
- Fire blankets in kitchens.
- Ironing boards – iron-rest heat pads.
- Portable heaters using LPG (liquid petroleum gas).
- Plant containers.
- Oven gloves.
- Simmering mats for the cooker.

Asbestos surveys that the Council undertakes will not include household items owned by the tenant. Asbestos is no longer used in goods such as toasters, hair dryers, gas and solid fuel appliances that conform to a British Standard. However, imported manufactured goods may still contain asbestos.

Loft or cavity insulation does not contain asbestos and is a man-made fibre.

How does Harlow Council manage asbestos in its homes?

Materials containing asbestos will remain in social housing for about the next 25-30 years. No Council in the UK has the resources to remove all the materials. However, each Council has a plan to manage asbestos in its homes to comply with the law and meet Government policy.

To gather information on asbestos in your home Harlow Council commissioned a survey, by a specialist contractor, of a representative sample of all Council homes.

The survey is classed as a management survey by the Health & Safety Executive. Homes will be re-inspected from time to time, depending on the type of asbestos and assessed level of risk. Refurbishment surveys will also take place, before Decent Homes works and improvements are undertaken.

After receiving a survey result, Harlow Council will take one of these four actions, depending on the risk:

Type of risk	Action
If the type of asbestos, location or condition poses a high risk, Harlow Council will take immediate action to have the material removed.	Remove immediately (Subject to 14 day notification).
If the risks are much lower but it would be more practical to remove the material as part of a larger maintenance plan on a number of homes at the same time.	Remove as part of a maintenance plan.
Certain asbestos materials can be safely contained by sealing and bonding to reduce or stop the release of fibers.	Seal/record and manage.
Items that are generally in good condition, sealed and not in a vulnerable position.	Record and manage.

Information we hold

We maintain an Asbestos Register Database showing all survey results and update this when appropriate. If you are planning home improvements or maintenance yourself, always ask our permission in the first instance. This is so we can check our records and advise if we think that any asbestos may be present. We may also arrange for a survey to be carried out.

If Harlow Council insists that all asbestos must be removed, sealed or repaired this work will be carried out by contractors with an appropriate special licence issued by the Government. These licensed contractors have to follow strict regulations to ensure asbestos is safely handled.

Asbestos dos and don'ts

Do make regular checks of any material that you think contains asbestos. Don't touch it but look for signs of wear and damage such as tears, abrasions or water damage. Damaged material may release asbestos fibres, especially if you often disturb it by hitting or handling it, or if it is exposed to extreme vibration or airflow.

If its condition has changed substantially since your last inspection, please call the Council Housing Property Team on **01279 446378**.

What are my responsibilities as a Council tenant?

Changes to the structure or the fabric of the property are not permitted under your tenancy agreement with the Council without prior approval in writing from a Harlow Council Surveyor. Always contact the Council for advice and permission before carrying out any home improvements.

If you personally carry out work, or enable and permit others to carry out work without our prior written approval, you will be totally liable for any costs of dealing with any asbestos incidents, as well as the cost of reinstatement. DIY work can result in brief but high levels of exposure to asbestos fibres. If you think a material might contain asbestos:

**Don't take risks! Don't carry out work on it!
Call our Housing Property Team on 01279 446378**

How should I dispose of asbestos? (tenant-owned items only)

You should never take out or try and dispose of asbestos in your home. Carefully dispose of suspect household items such as ironing board rests, oven gloves, simmering pads and old fire blankets as soon as possible. Damp them down and put them in a tightly sealed plastic bag labelled "asbestos" or wrap with polythene sheeting. Don't try to unfasten the ironing board heat pad, or remove the fire blanket from its holder. By doing so, you will increase the risk substantially and may create some dust and debris.

In your garden there may be an old shed that you inherited or built many years ago. If this is not part of the original Harlow Council property, this belongs to you and you have full responsibility for its condition and maintenance. Some sheds contain asbestos sheeting to the roof or walls. If you wish to carry out any work to a shed, the Council can offer simple guidance but any work must be carried out by a specialist contractor.

It is against the law to put any asbestos waste in a bin – please seek advice from Contact Harlow on **01279 446655** about making arrangements for collection and disposal at a designated site.

What if I buy my home under the “Right to Buy”?

When you become a homeowner, you are responsible for materials containing asbestos in your home (subject to the restrictions under the Right to Buy). But if you don't take the precautions stated in this guide, you could be putting at risk the lives of you, your family and the contractor. After buying your home, you need to make your own arrangements for re-inspection. The Council's Housing Property Team will be able to help you choose a suitable contractor.

Useful websites:

Harlow Council
www.harlow.gov.uk/housing-asbestos

Health & Safety Executive
www.hse.gov.uk

Harlow Council
Housing Property Team
Civic Centre
The Water Gardens
Harlow

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