Human Resources – HSW Handbook

3.23 Asbestos Management

Purpose
The purpose of this information sheet is to provide general information for staff concerned about potential or actual exposure to asbestos.

Q1 Why are we cautious around asbestos?
Asbestos has been linked to certain health problems amongst those exposed to high levels of air borne fibres. In order to reduce workplace health and safety risks we have special precautions around the use of and work with asbestos.

Q2 What is asbestos?
Asbestos being a natural material is always present in the environment but usually in very low concentrations compared with the amount released by industrial processes. The environmental background count has been measured at 0.001 respirable fibres per millilitre of air – or the equivalent of 1 fibre per litre of air in the world’s atmosphere. Given that the average person breathes about 8,600 litres per day the literature suggests we all breathe in thousands of fibres along with other dust/material each day. In spite of this the general population does not generally contract asbestos related diseases.

Q3 What asbestos related activities are seen as increasing risk?
Asbestos becomes a potential health risk when large volumes of fibres are breathed in, so precautions are taken to keep fibre production to a minimum and to monitor fibres in the air at worksites where fibres are likely to be generated. Fibres may be generated through cutting, breaking, drilling or eroding of asbestos containing materials.

Q4 What are the primary risk factors?
There are a number of risk dependencies including concentration of airborne fibres, length of exposure and type of asbestos.

Q5 What do I do if I have been exposed to asbestos fibres?
A single exposure is unlikely to lead to any major health problems. Report any known or potential incident, as this will then be investigated and any asbestos fibres can be cleaned up to avoid potential exposure of anyone else. A permanent record will be created in the University’s Records Management Office so that should any asbestos related health issues occur they can be dealt with under Workers Compensation or other appropriate processes/Insurance.

Q6 What is the difference between friable and non-friable asbestos?
- **Non-friable** means that the asbestos fibres included in the product are held within a solid matrix (e.g. cement in asbestos cement sheeting) and are less likely to become airborne unless the product is damaged. Asbestos fences, roofs and asbestos cement sheeting are examples of non-friable asbestos products.

- **Friable asbestos** products contain loosely packed asbestos fibres and can be crushed easily in the hand. Examples of friable asbestos products include insulating rope on old oven doors, asbestos insulation and asbestos fibre blankets.
Q7  How do I know if a material contains asbestos?
Generally, it is not possible to determine whether a material contains asbestos simply by looking at it. The only way to be sure it contains asbestos is to get a sample analysed by a laboratory. Please contact Campus Services if you want a sample tested.

Q8  What if you think there may be some asbestos in an area that is inaccessible?
Building owners are not required to dismantle parts of the building or plant to locate asbestos. If there are plans to demolish or alter these areas, an assessment would need to be undertaken to check for asbestos before starting work.

Q9  What is the process if you think you have possibly disturbed asbestos?
Cease work immediately and ensure that other people working in the area are notified of a possible risk (or notify the Supervisor to pass this information on to others). Contact the Campus Services Maintenance Service Centre, who will check the asbestos register. If not registered, then the University’s licensed asbestos service provider will be contacted to undertake an analysis and/or air monitoring as applicable. If confirmed, then corrective action will be taken to eliminate the risk of exposure and the asbestos register updated accordingly.

Further Information

If you require further information, please contact a member of the HSW Team.