



Health & Safety

# MATTERS

Health & Safety Information for GMB Safety Reps

## Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations (2006) A Guide for Safety Reps

### Introduction

Almost anyone with an interest in asbestos issues will be aware of the contentious introduction of the Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations in November 2006. The main area of disagreement centred around the removal from the formal licensing regime of Textured Coatings, such as Artex. As a result of this, guidance has been published by the HSE/TUC specifically for safety representatives.

### Changes to the Control of Asbestos at work Regulations:

- There is a new lower limit of 0.1 fibres per millilitre of air as measured over 4 hours.
- Work with textured coatings will generally not need to be done by a licensed contractor. It will, however, still need to be carried out by trained, competent people working at safe standards.
- Employers can no longer carry out any asbestos work on their own premises without a licence.
- Suitable training is required for those who are, or who maybe exposed to asbestos.

### Safety Representatives role:

As the employer has a duty to manage asbestos GMB safety reps are entitled to be consulted on the way the employer approaches the management of asbestos. The HSE even stipulates that they should receive appropriate training for this role and specifies that they are entitled to receive:-

- The results of any surveys that have been conducted on the presence of asbestos.
- A copy of the current risk assessment relating to any work with asbestos.
- A copy of the plan of work.
- Details of any monitoring strategy and results.
- Maintenance records of any control measures.
- Personal information from any health records.
- A copy of employees training records.
- Results of any face fit records for respiratory protective equipment (RPE).

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## GMB SAFETY REPS

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## If Asbestos is discovered in the workplace?

Perhaps the most important change relates to what a safety rep should do when coming across material which the rep believes may contain asbestos, for example if it has been damaged and there is a risk of exposure to asbestos fibres. **YOU SHOULD ASK EVERYONE TO LEAVE THE AREA IMMEDIATELY!** The employer or Building occupier should ensure no further work takes place until the area is safe - this is defined as appropriate action when taking into consideration the high level of risk. This will normally involve the possible sealing, or encapsulating, of the material and suitable marking and recording of its presence, or the safe removal of the material and the cleaning of the area, by trained personnel with suitable equipment.

This is the first time that this advice has been given in such a clear cut manner and only serves to emphasise the importance of avoiding exposure to asbestos.

## Where Asbestos might be found:

Asbestos is most likely to be found in:-

- ◆ Loose packing between floors and partition walls.
- ◆ Sprayed fire insulation on beams and girders.
- ◆ Lagging on pipe work and boilers.
- ◆ Asbestos Insulation Board- partition walls.
- ◆ Asbestos cement- pipes, guttering, roof sheeting.
- ◆ Other products- floor tiles, textured coatings.

## Who is most likely to be exposed to Asbestos fibres?

Anyone who is involved in any form of building maintenance is liable to Asbestos exposure whilst at work if adequate precautions are not taken. This will include electricians, cable fitters, joiners, plumbers, gas fitters, maintenance staff and school staff. However, this list is not exhaustive and anyone who disturbs any sort of building materials should be aware of the threat from exposure to asbestos fibres.

## Conclusion

The introduction of the new regulations caused problems between the trade unions and the HSE, principally due to the exclusion of Artex from the licensing regime. However the guidance does establish some important principles for safety representatives.

For more detailed information please check out [www.tuc.org.uk/extras/asbestosguide.pdf](http://www.tuc.org.uk/extras/asbestosguide.pdf) or contact [tristan.chard@gmb.org.uk](mailto:tristan.chard@gmb.org.uk)

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