# Unit 3 Asbestos Risk Assessment

## Learning Outcomes

**By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:**

- ✓ Confidently perform an in-depth asbestos risk assessment in the workplace
- ✓ Determine whether the work required needs to be performed by a licensed contractor
- ✓ Understand who is at greatest risk from exposure to asbestos and why

# Unit 3

# Asbestos Risk Assessment

**Managing and Working With Asbestos**

Before you start any work in a building that might contain asbestos (eg built or refurbished before the year 2000), you need to do the following:

**Identify Whether Asbestos Is Present and Determine its Type and Condition**

- People responsible for maintenance of non-domestic premises, have a 'duty to manage' the asbestos in them, and should provide you with information on where any asbestos is in the building and what condition it is in.
- If no information is available or it is limited and you suspect asbestos may be present you should have the area surveyed and representative samples of the material you are going to work on analysed.
- Alternatively, you can assume that any material you need to disturb does contain asbestos and take the appropriate precautions for the highest risk situation.

**Carry out a Risk Assessment**

- Decide if its possible to carry out the building or maintenance work avoiding the risk of asbestos exposure all together.
- If that's not possible, identify who might be at risk and the level of possible asbestos exposure from any work.
- On this basis, decide what work methods are necessary to provide effective control of the risks.
- Further information on carrying out a risk assessment is available.

**Decide if the Work needs to be carried out by a Licensed Contractor**

- Most asbestos removal work will require a contractor holding a licence from HSE.
- All work with sprayed asbestos coatings and asbestos lagging and most work with asbestos insulation and asbestos insulating board (AIB) requires a licence.
- Identify if your work needs a licensed contractor;
- Find a licensed contractor, or find out how to apply for a licence.

**If the Work is not Licensable, Decide if the Work needs to be notified**

- If it doesn't need a licence, you can do maintenance work on or around ACMs with the appropriate controls in place.
- Some non-licensed work also has additional requirements, ie notification of work, medical surveillance and record keeping. This work is known as notifiable non-licensed work (NNLW).

**Ensure those carrying out the Work are Suitably Trained**

- Any worker who is liable to disturb asbestos during their day-to-day work needs to receive appropriate training to enable them to protect themselves and others.

**Am I at Risk?**

Workers involved in refurbishment, maintenance and other similar trades, could be at risk of exposure to asbestos during their work. This includes:

- Heating and ventilation engineers
- Demolition workers
- Carpenters and joiners
- Plumbers
- Roofing contractors
- Painters and decorators
- Plasterers
- Construction workers
- Fire and burglar alarm installers
- Shop fitters
- Gas fitters
- Computer and data installers
- General maintenance staff eg caretakers
- Telecommunications engineers
- Architects, building surveyors, and other such professionals
- Cable layers
- Electricians

This list does not include all occupations at risk from potential exposure to asbestos.

**When am I most at Risk?**

You are most at risk when:

- the building you are working on was built before the year 2000
- you are working on an unfamiliar site
- asbestos-containing materials were not identified before the job was started
- asbestos-containing materials were identified but this information was not passed on by the people in charge to the people doing the work
- you haven't done a risk assessment
- you don't know how to recognise and work safely with asbestos
- you have not had appropriate information, instruction and training
- you know how to work safely with asbestos, but you choose to put yourself at risk by not following proper precautions, perhaps to save time or because no one else is following proper procedures

**Remember**

- you can't see or smell asbestos fibres in the air
- the effects of being exposed to asbestos take many years to show up - avoid breathing it in now
- people who smoke and are also exposed to asbestos fibres are at a much greater risk of developing lung cancer
- asbestos is only a danger when fibres are made airborne and breathed in
- as long as the asbestos is in good condition and it is located somewhere where it can't be easily damaged then it shouldn't be a risk to you

## Risk Assessments

Before starting any work that is likely to disturb asbestos, a suitable and sufficient risk assessment must be prepared by the employer.

Whoever carries out the risk assessment must:

- be competent to do the risk assessment
- carry it out before work begins and allow enough time to put appropriate precautions in place
- make sure the assessment is job specific and considers all aspects of the work

Risk assessments are about identifying and controlling the risks:

- establish the potential risk (including general risk such as falls from height) and identify who may be affected
- identify the action to be taken to remove the risk, or if that is not possible, to reduce the risk to as low as possible
- record the findings of the risk assessment, and the action to be taken, and inform employees
- implement the actions to be taken
- review and update the risk assessment as required

**Competency**

Whoever carries out the risk assessment must have a sufficient level of knowledge, training and expertise. This is to make sure that they understand the risks from asbestos (and general risks) to enable them to make informed decisions about the risks and identify the appropriate action required to reduce them. They will also need to be able to estimate the expected level of exposure to help them decide whether or not the control limit is likely to be exceeded.

**Content of the Risk Assessment**

A suitable and sufficient risk assessment should include full details of the work to be undertaken and how long the work is expected to take. It should also include:

- details of the type and quantity of the asbestos
- details of the expected level of exposure

- details of the controls to be used to reduce exposure eg use of local exhaust ventilation, controlled wetting, adequate PPE / RPE use of enclosures
- decontamination procedures for tools, equipment and PPE
- details on how asbestos waste will be managed
- emergency procedures

The findings of the assessment should be communicated to employees, and anybody else who could be affected. A copy of the risk assessment must be available on site.

**Further Reading:**

- ✓ Asbestos 2nd Edition by Ronald F. Dodson (Editor), Samuel P. Hammar (Editor)
- ✓ Asbestos: Risk Assessment, Epidemiology, and Health Effects 1st Edition, Kindle Edition by Ronald F. Dodson (Author, Editor), Samuel P. Hammar (Author, Editor) ,2005