



Asbestos In Domestic Properties – Asbestos Cement Materials

What is asbestos cement and where will you find asbestos cement materials (ACMs)?

Asbestos cement is where asbestos fibres (predominantly white asbestos) are added to cement to lend the cement its unique properties.

The major domestic uses of asbestos cement are: corrugated cement sheeting (such as on garage roofs, outhouse roofs, etc), flat sheets, general lining to buildings, roofing slates, water pipes, water tanks, and cement flues.

Are there any health risks associated with asbestos cement materials (ACMs)?

85% of all asbestos materials are 'hard encapsulated' (HE) asbestos containing materials (ACMs) and there is no measurable risk to health from the asbestos content in asbestos cement.

Most ACMs are made solely from white (chrysotile) asbestos; although a few ACMs can sometimes contain blue or brown (amphibole) asbestos, and some older ACMs may have had their white asbestos contaminated with another asbestos fibre, tremolite.

Do not let anyone tell you this is a problem, however, as all the fibres are locked away and, whatever the composition, the asbestos content in asbestos cement poses no measurable risk to health. If you wish to read the Asbestos Watchdog paper on 'Casitile', please contact us.

It is interesting to note that 1/3 of drinking water is still delivered through asbestos cement pipes, even though some were mainly made with blue asbestos. The fibres are locked away in the cement though and pose no measurable risk to health.

Do you need to remove your asbestos cement structures by law?

Current legislation recognises the difference in risks between various asbestos products; accordingly the licensing regulations do not apply to asbestos cement products. You have no legal obligation to remove asbestos cement structures just because they are asbestos containing.

Any contractor who forces you to remove asbestos cement products from your domestic property is either ignorant of the legislation or trying to exploit your ignorance.

If you are selling your house, can your property become devalued if asbestos cement materials are present?

A common problem if you are selling your house is for a surveyor to suggest you have to remove your asbestos cement materials; threatening you with devaluation of your property if you fail to comply.

You are under NO legal obligation to remove any of the ACMs, and anyone threatening to devalue your property under the pretext of the new buyer having to remove the asbestos cement products once they move in is fraud.

The prospective buyer of your property will not be under any legal obligation to remove the structures, and should they wish to remove them for other reasons, it should cost no more than removing non-asbestos cement materials.

Does the presence of asbestos cement materials in a house you are about to buy condemn it?

Any surveyor condemning a house you are intending to purchase because of the presence of asbestos cement materials is providing you with incorrect information. Neither the current homeowner, nor you, is under any obligation to remove the asbestos cement structures (such as asbestos cement garage roofs, asbestos cement water tanks, etc). The presence of asbestos cement materials in good repair does not reduce the property's value; any surveyor trying to tell you different is either ignorant of the legislation, or trying to exploit your ignorance. Indeed, white asbestos materials are common in approximately 8 million UK homes and cause no measurable risk to health.

If the asbestos cement materials are in disrepair and on moving into the property you wish to remove them, it should cost no more than removing non-asbestos cement structures and they should not be treated as different to non-asbestos products by your surveyor.

If you want the structure removed for other reasons, do you require a specially licensed contractor?

One of the main headaches for domestic property owners is finding a contractor who will not overcharge you for your work. The good news is that asbestos cement is not a licensable asbestos product; it does not require a specially licensed asbestos removal contractor to do the work. Any competent regular jobbing contractor can do the work for you; we suggest ringing round a few local contractors for quotes. This will be cheaper than unnecessarily hiring a specially licensed asbestos contractor.

If you want to remove asbestos cement from your domestic property yourself, can you?

If you feel you are competent enough to remove asbestos cement products (such as garage roofs, asbestos cement water tanks, etc), asbestos cement is not licensable, so you are able to carry out the work yourself.

As with all such work, we urge you to take care handling materials and observe appropriate safety procedures. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) suggests you kit yourself out with all the necessary precautionary safety equipment (mask, gloves, etc) and treat the asbestos cement with respect. If you need to break it up, do so carefully and double bag it ready for disposal.

Can you use power tools on asbestos cement materials?

Disturbing asbestos cement materials by drilling, cutting holes, breaking them up, etc is possible and does NOT release hazardous levels of respirable fibres, but be careful as using power tools can be difficult on asbestos cement (remember the cement dust is probably a greater hazard than the asbestos).

Where can you dispose of waste asbestos cement?

Although asbestos cement materials do not need to be handled by licensed contractors, they do need to be taken to a specially licensed tip. Some local councils provide a domestic asbestos waste collection service; we suggest telephoning your local council to see if you live in an area where this is available. If they do not offer this service, they will be able to advise you on where your local asbestos licensed tip is and options of how to get your waste there.