



Asbestos in Domestic Properties - Textured Decorative Coatings (TDCs) (such as Artex)

What are Textured Decorative Coatings (TDCs) and where are they found?

TDCs are the textured decorative plasters (Artex being one of the most common) and are mostly found on ceilings and walls of domestic properties decorated in the 1950s – 1980s. Until approximately 1984, TDCs could contain very small quantities (around 2%) of white asbestos fibres. Even before this date, however, most textured plasters were not asbestos containing.

Are there any health risks associated with TDCs?

Due to a misunderstanding with the authorities, TDCs have been classed as asbestos containing coatings as they were confused with Limpet products (100% asbestos fibres sprayed onto support beams in buildings as fire insulation). There is, however, no measurable risk to health from the asbestos content in TDCs.

Do you need to remove TDCs from your property by law?

There is no measurable risk to your health from the asbestos content in TDCs and any contractor who tries to force you to remove them based on this is trying to exploit your ignorance. There is no law demanding that you remove the TDCs from your property either, if you had no plans on removing them.

If you are selling your house, can your property become devalued if TDCs are present?

A common scam if you are selling your house is for a surveyor to suggest you need to remove your TDCs; threatening you with devaluation of your property if you fail to comply.

You are under NO legal obligation to remove TDCs from your ceilings or walls, and anyone threatening to devalue your property under the pretext of the new buyer having to remove the TDCs once they move in is fraud. The prospective buyer of your property will not be under any legal obligation to remove them either.

Does the presence of TDCs 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 TDCs is providing you with incorrect information. Neither the current homeowner nor you are under any legal obligation to remove the TDCs.

The presence of TDCs in good condition should not reduce the property's value or pose any measurable risk to health; the best thing you can do is to leave them alone. If you strongly dislike the décor, however, and wish to change it the best course of action is to plaster over it for a fraction of the cost of expensive removal.

If you want your TDCs removed for other reasons, do you need a specially licensed contractor?

TDCs have recently been taken out of the licensing regulations and are now no longer licensable materials. Whereas previously TDCs required licensed asbestos contractors to remove them, now the work can be carried out by any trained and competent contractor using the proper controls. We suggest ringing round a few local contractors for quotes. This will be cheaper than unnecessarily hiring a specially licensed asbestos contractor, but be thorough when deciding if you really want this work done and wary when employing contractors; make sure you get a range of quotes to compare rates.

If you have been told you have 'trace' levels of asbestos in your TDCs, what does it mean?

Due to the difficulty in finding asbestos content when TDC samples are studied, many laboratories cover their results by declaring 'may contain trace levels of asbestos'. This normally means 0% asbestos content. If your report comes back with only 'trace' levels of asbestos found, it normally indicates there wasn't any there in the first place; you can then make decisions on your next steps accordingly.

If you have TDC ceilings or walls, can you use power tools on them?

The asbestos content (if any) in TDCs is minimal and poses no measurable risk to health. Adding light fittings, picture hooks, or similar, by drilling or making holes, poses no measurable risk to health.

If you do this work yourself it is advisable to damp down surfaces before drilling or making holes, and wearing a mask to prevent inhalation of any dust in general.

The use of power tools such as sanders, or abrasive scrapers, on TDCs, however, is not advised. Power sanders create large volumes of dust (irrespective of any potential asbestos content) and should not be used on asbestos containing materials. Don't forget ALL forms of respirable dust can be harmful.