

Asbestos in Cedar Chase

Following questions from residents about possible asbestos-containing materials, the Committee commissioned a full survey of a sample house in August 2013. The surveyors were told that a full-house refurbishment was planned, so they took samples from all materials that could possibly contain asbestos, and opened all voids, loft-spaces, cupboards and wall-panels to make sure that they found everything.

The report shows that we do not have a big problem, but that there are some materials that we need to treat with care – particularly when re-decorating or doing repairs.

The full text of the report (46 pages) is on the Cedar Chase website. This is a summary of the main points.

Why is asbestos a problem?

Asbestos is a mineral that easily divides into tiny fibres. These can be very much smaller than a human hair – so small that they pass right through a normal vacuum cleaner. The fibres are known to cause serious lung diseases if inhaled.

Asbestos has properties that make it a very useful building material. It was used for insulation, fire-proofing, and many less-obvious purposes from about 1900 until it was banned in 2000. Very little was used in the UK after 1985, but any building constructed before that date is likely to have some asbestos in it.

What should we do?

In most cases, nothing. The advice from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) is to leave it alone if at all possible. Asbestos is only dangerous if it is disturbed so that it releases fibres.

Living in a house with asbestos-containing materials is not a problem: the hazards come when building or decorating work is done. Most of the people who get asbestos-related diseases are tradesmen: plumbers, electricians, carpenters, decorators and builders.

When you have work done on the house, please show the attached asbestos register to the people doing the work. They can then take appropriate precautions.

Fortunately most of the asbestos-containing materials used in Cedar Chase bind the fibres very tightly to other materials so they are unlikely to get away. The exception is some of the boards in the under-stairs cupboard, mentioned in more detail overleaf.

List of asbestos-containing materials

Insulation boards lining under-stairs cupboard and alongside the original Lennox hot-air unit	Medium risk
Roof slates	Low risk
Roofing felt	Very low risk
Soffit panel above the front door	Very low risk
Artex textured ceiling	Very low risk
Marley (plastic) floor tiles	Very low risk
Boiler flue pipe	Very low risk

It is possible that some houses have materials that were not found in the sample survey, but this list is likely to apply to most. For the full list of materials that were tested and found not to contain asbestos, see the survey report on the website.

The under-stairs cupboard

This is the only area where you might want to take some action. The problem material is called Asbestos Insulation Board (AIB), and it was used to line the under-side of the staircase, on the inner face of the door, and between the hot-air unit and the delivery duct. In most cases the boards are unprotected, so if you rub or knock them you might release fibres.

The simplest way to deal with these boards is to paint them. Don't rub them down or even try to remove surface dust – just paint over it all, ideally with a low-pressure spray paint. Obviously the gas supply to the boiler must be turned off first!

If the boards are damaged or there is too much dust then it would be wise to get an HSE-licensed contractor to do the job.

If you do damage any AIB, *don't* use a brush or a vacuum cleaner to clear it up. Dampen the dust slightly with a garden mister and use wet-wipes or damp cloths to collect it. Seal the cloths in double plastic bags for disposal. Wash carefully.

If you want the boards removed entirely it is essential to use a licensed contractor. The job is likely to take two days and to cost £2000 - £2500.

Small jobs

It is safe to do limited work on some of the asbestos-containing materials if appropriate precautions are taken. The Health & Safety Executive website has detailed advice sheets explaining what to do: www.hse.gov.uk

