



Recognising asbestos

- Fibrous mineral, typically white; naturally occurs in many varieties.
- Versatile and valuable properties: fire resistant; thermal and electrical insulator; chemical and water resistant; can be woven and spun; can be mixed with other materials such as cement, resin and rubber.
- In the UK was widely used from 19th Century onwards; 1857 first recorded asbestos product; not completely banned until 1999.
- Known to have been used in Ancient Egypt and 1st Century Roman empire; may occur in artefacts from these periods onwards.
- Many uses: brake shoes, gaskets, fire blankets, electrical wire insulation.
- Highly likely to be encountered in many museum collections.

What are the harmful effects?

- Asbestos diseases: caused by breathing in the microscopic asbestos fibres:
 - Asbestosis, mesothelioma (life expectancy one year from diagnosis).
 - Cancer of the lung / gastrointestinal tract / kidney / larynx, pleural plaques, diffuse pleural thickening.
 - Latency ten to fifty years.
- Largest cause of occupational death in the UK.
- There is no safe exposure level; the risks are related to exposure.

Legislation

- Control of Asbestos Regulations, 2012

ASBESTOS IN COLLECTIONS

Asbestos dos and don'ts

If you discover or suspect that an object contains asbestos:

- Don't touch it.
- Do leave it where it is.
- Do warn others in the area.
- Do Inform the person responsible for the collection
- Do Double wrap in polythene if you can do this without disturbing the asbestos, completely seal with parcel tape, apply a warning label →
- Don't open or disturb any areas that have been labelled
- Do Seek advice about how to proceed



Guidance

Further information can be obtained from: www.hse.gov.uk/asbestos

Asbestos contractors with experience of working with historic objects

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