

Health Hazards of Asbestos



What is Asbestos?

Asbestos is the name given to a number of fibrous form mineral silicates. Chrysotile (white asbestos), amosite (brown asbestos) and crocidolite (blue asbestos) are the common types of asbestos in Hong Kong.

Common Uses of Asbestos

Asbestos has been widely used in the past because of its great tensile strength, flexibility and good resistance to heat, friction and chemicals.



Roof tile and grille panel



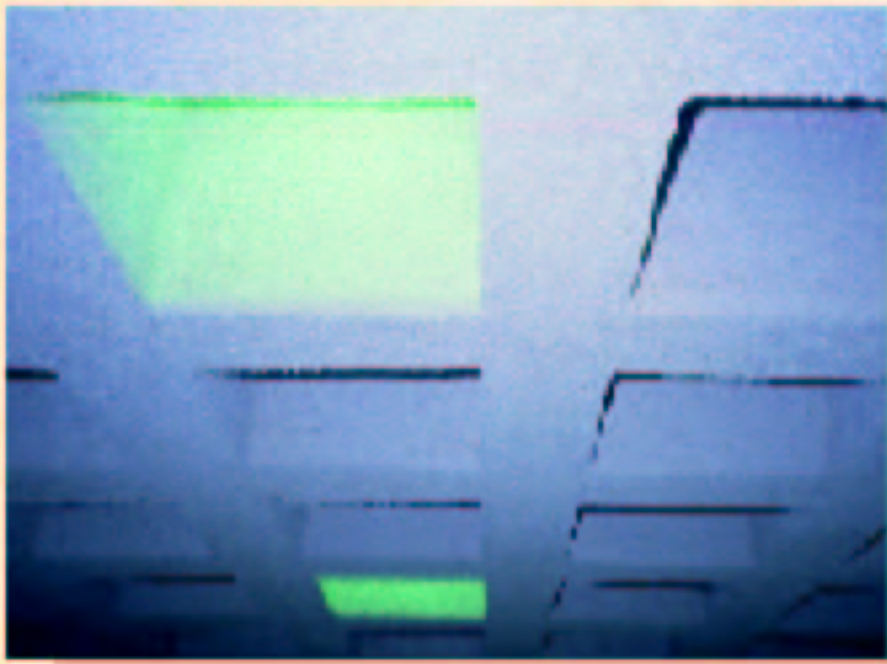
Corrugated sheet



Vinyl floor tile



Asbestos pipe



Wall and ceiling plaster



Fire-proof clothing and blanket



Brake and clutch lining



Boiler and pipe lagging

Health Hazards

Workers may inhale asbestos fibres in the manufacture and the use of asbestos containing materials, as well as in renovation and demolition work.

Asbestos fibres may cause

- ★ Asbestosis - progressive fibrosis of the lung with increasing respiratory disability
- ★ Pleural plaque and calcification
- ★ Mesothelioma - malignant lesions of the chest or abdominal lining
- ★ Lung cancer



Brake maintenance



Removing acoustic plaster



Pipe work maintenance

Prevention and Control of Health Hazards

Avoid using asbestos and substitute it with a safer alternative, e.g. man-made mineral fibres, as far as practicable. If work with asbestos containing materials cannot be avoided, the following preventive measures should be adopted to minimize inhalation of asbestos fibres:

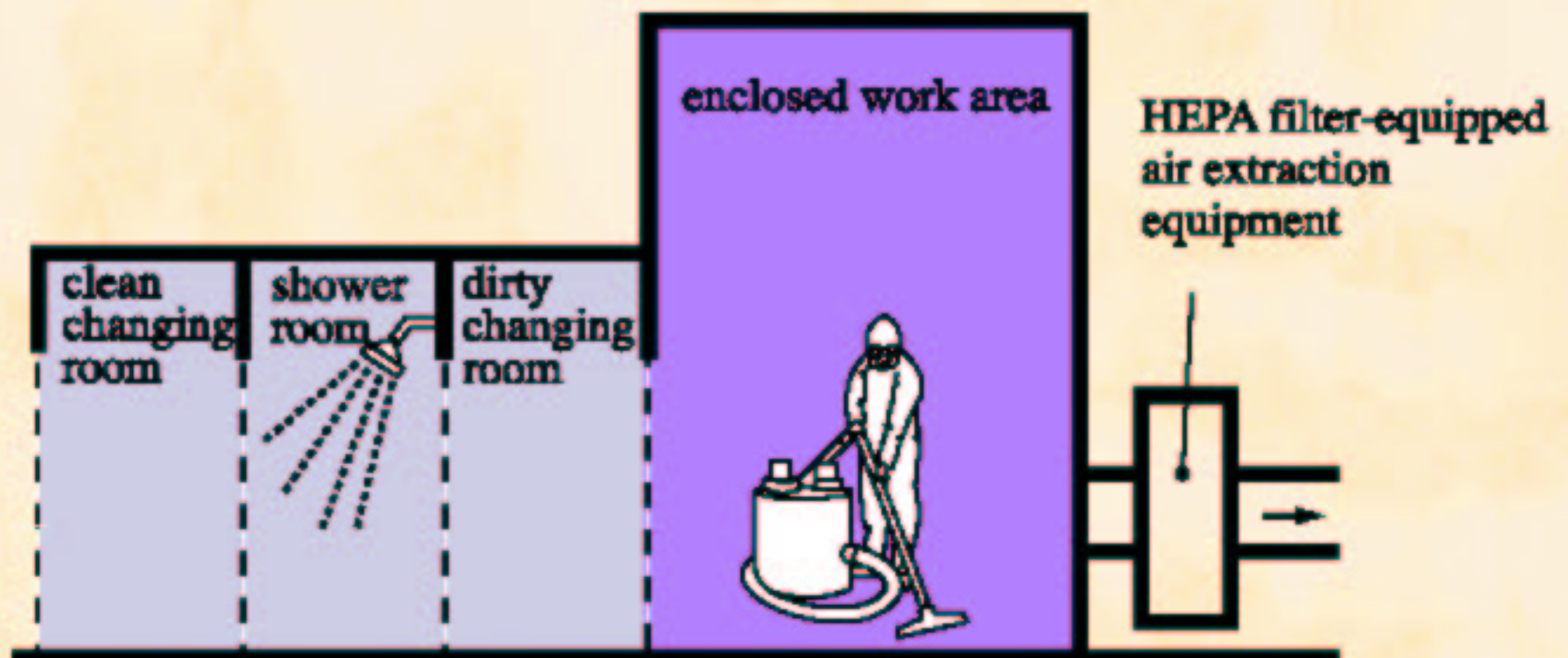
Assessment of risks

- ★ Assess the risk of workers' exposure to asbestos before asbestos work



Segregation

- ★ Isolate asbestos work from other areas



Dust control at source

- ★ Enclose dust sources
- ★ Use exhaust ventilation system with high efficiency particulate air filter (HEPA filter)
- ★ Apply wet-down method



Good housekeeping

- ★ Clean workplace regularly with vacuum cleaners (equipped with HEPA filter) or by wet mopping
- ★ Store and transport loose asbestos containing materials in proper and sealed containers with proper warning labels



Personal protective equipment

- ★ Use appropriate respirators approved by the Commissioner for Labour
- ★ Full body protection, including an overall, head cover and shoe covers



Personal hygiene

- ★ No eating, drinking or smoking in asbestos control zone
- ★ Clean the body thoroughly before leaving the workplace



Instruction and training

- ★ Workers should be given adequate instruction and training on the health hazards of asbestos and the necessary preventive and protective measures

Air Monitoring

- ★ Monitor the workers' exposure to asbestos dust to ensure adequate protection

Supervision

- ★ Ensure that workers have taken adequate precautions when working with asbestos



Medical surveillance

All asbestos workers should have pre-employment and annual medical examinations so as to detect early signs of asbestos-related diseases. The examination should include a Chest X-ray.

Asbestos workers having the following signs and symptoms should seek early medical advice:

- ★ breathlessness on exertion
- ★ transient sharp pains in the chest
- ★ cough for more than four weeks
- ★ clubbing of fingers



Further Information

For detail guidance, please refer to the "Code of Practice - Safety and Health at Work with Asbestos" published by the Labour Department. This leaflet is issued free of charge and can be obtained from offices of the Occupational Safety and Health Branch of the Labour Department. Its content can also be downloaded from the Labour Department website at <http://www.info.gov.hk/labour/eng/public/index.htm>

If you have any enquiry, please contact:

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