

Asbestos in wire/mesh gauzes in school laboratories

The HSE have stated that the health risk from the use of the gauze will generally be extremely low for several reasons:

- The material is predominantly non-asbestos
- There is very limited physical contact with the material when in use
- Any contact is light and momentary

Consequently, any free fibre release into the air is minimal.

How do Schools know if they have asbestos containing gauzes?

You cannot tell if any of your gauzes contain asbestos simply by looking at them. You will need to contact your gauze supplier and request a copy of a test certificate from a UK based organisation which is UKAS accredited for testing of bulk samples of asbestos and is working to HSG 248. The certificate is the only way to confirm that your gauzes are asbestos free. A letter from a supplier or an entry in a sales brochure suggesting that the gauzes are asbestos free is not enough from an assurance perspective.

Schools should not handle, use or move their stock of wire/mesh gauzes until they ascertain whether they are likely to contain asbestos.

What do Schools need to do if they have asbestos containing gauzes?

Any gauzes that contain asbestos will need to be disposed of in accordance with HSE document em9. This includes gauzes where the manufacturer is unknown and there is no certificate from a UKAS accredited testing facility confirming that the gauzes are asbestos free.

Where non- asbestos containing gauzes are stored directly alongside asbestos containing gauzes, these should be treated as contaminated waste. Other equipment (such as clay triangles, Bunsen burners etc) which may have been stored with asbestos-containing gauzes should be wiped clean with a damp cloth if there is any visible dust present. Any cloths should be disposed of as contaminated waste. Any debris in containers or boxes should be carefully cleaned up and disposed of.

Schools are requested to utilise the expertise of specialist companies to carry out any disposal and clean-up work. There are currently five Companies which Ealing Council uses for asbestos related work. Schools should use one of the following companies (at a charge to the School and listed in alphabetical order) for this work:

- 1) Aspect <http://www.aspectcontracts.co.uk/>
- 2) Cablesheer <http://cablesheergroup.co.uk/>
- 3) Ductclean <https://dcukfm.com/>
- 4) Erith <http://www.erith.com/>
- 5) European Asbestos <https://www.european-asbestos.co.uk/>

Can Schools still use the laboratories on the meantime?

The advice is that it is safe to carry on using any science rooms as normal with the exception of any suspect gauzes. No deep cleaning of any laboratories is required.

Do Parents need to be informed?

The health risks from the use of these gauzes has been confirmed by the HSE to be extremely low. If Schools wish to inform parents about the issue, then a reassuring stance is advised. If Schools decide to inform parents, points to include will include:

- What the issue is including a picture of a typical gauze
- The fact that the HSE have confirmed that the risk from the use of these gauzes is extremely low
- The issue has arisen through failings of suppliers to Schools
- You are following advice from the HSE and other specialists

What is the HSE doing with the Suppliers of these gauzes?

The HSE is currently investigating the issue. Asbestos use and supply is prohibited in the EU/UK but not everywhere in the world.

Do Teachers/Technicians/Teaching Assistants need to get exposure to asbestos recorded on their medical records?

The advice from the HSE is that this is not necessary in this case. If anyone wanted to though, that is their personal choice.

Is this incident reportable to the HSE as part of the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013?

The HSE are the ones investigating this and no report is required to be made to them.

New gauzes buying guide

When buying new gauzes, Schools should seek confirmation from the supplier that they do not contain asbestos. The only way to be certain is to request a certificate from a UKAS accredited company stating that samples have been tested and are free from asbestos. The following logo on the certificate should be looked for:



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