The Asbestosis Research Council

Recommended Code of Practice

For Handling, Working and Fixing of Asbestos and Asbestos Cement Products in the Building and Construction Industries

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The Asbestosis Research Council

Present factory regulations recognise asbestosis as an industrial disease which could arise from the inhalation of asbestos dust. The regulations, which stipulate rules for the protection of work-people engaged in the manufacture of certain types of asbestos products, do not include any special requirements relating to the handling of products containing asbestos for use in building construction.

The Ministry of Labour is now considering extending the regulations which apply to the handling of asbestos and asbestos cement products in factories so that they cover wider applications of handling and processing and, while it is not certain to what extent this change will apply to the building and construction industries, it is felt that some preliminary guidance should be given. This guidance takes the form of a Recommended Code of Practice which is prepared in anticipation of the extension to the regulations.

The use and manipulation of asbestos and asbestos cement products is very diverse and ranges from the fixing of an occasional single sheet to extensive operations involving cutting or machining by power-driven equipment. While care should always be exercised, special precautions are only necessary when there is a possibility that operatives may inhale asbestos dust as a result of proximity to cutting, grinding or similar operations.

Finally it should be emphasised that there is no hazard in the handling, working and fixing of these products, provided that the simple precautions outlined below are followed. For convenience, the Recommended Code of Practice is divided into two sections:

a *for factory conditions and confined spaces;*

b *for site working.*

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Recommended Code of Practice

1

Products

This Code of Practice covers asbestos and asbestos cement products. The content of asbestos may vary, but the recommendations are the same for all products.

2

Handling and Working under Factory Conditions and in Confined Spaces

The following procedures should be adopted when working with asbestos products.

2.1. Cutting, Grinding or Turning by Mechanical Means

2.1.1. When mechanical cutting or machining takes place, efficient dust extraction equipment should be installed, or respirators of a type which are approved by the Factory Inspectorate should be worn.

2.1.2. The approved respirators should be carefully maintained and adequate servicing arrangements should be made to ensure that this is done and that employees are not without respirators during maintenance. (See note A.)

2.1.3. Waste, dust or off-cuts should not be allowed to accumulate in the working area and should be disposed of in such a way as to avoid the escape of dust. Damping or wetting of waste before disposal is recommended.

2.1.4. Vacuum cleaning plant should be used to keep ledges, floors, trusses, etc. free from dust accumulation. Removal of dust by brushing should be avoided.

2.2. Additional Hygiene

2.2.1. The best standards of good factory housekeeping and hygiene should apply to factory mechanical cutting areas. Such areas are best segregated and used for no other purpose. In addition to dust exhaust on machines, a good standard of general room ventilation should be maintained.

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2.2.2. Operatives should wear overalls that can be kept in a clean, dust-free condition. These overalls should be made from nylon or other synthetic material and should be free from open pockets, etc.

2.2.3. Where heating is necessary, radiant panel heaters should be used, rather than fan assisted heaters which tend to keep dust in suspension.

2.3. Medical Supervision

2.3.1. Operatives should be advised on the precautions to be taken when cutting asbestos and asbestos cement products.

2.3.2. Wherever possible, arrangements should be made for routine examination of workers who are regularly engaged in this work. Particular attention should be given to examining new workers before employment or as soon as possible afterwards. (See note B.)

3
Handling and Working Under Site Conditions

Where a considerable run of cut material is required in any one size, pre-cut material rather than site-cut material should be used.

Some site-cutting is, however, inevitable, and the following practice should be followed in such cases:

3.1. Mechanical Site Cutting

3.1.1. In general, the same recommendations apply as for factory cutting, bearing in mind that the site operation will be of a temporary nature and will often take place in the open air. Few site-available power tools have dust exhaust attachments. Where these are not available, it may well be possible to use a portable dust exhaust unit.

3.1.2. Where it is not possible for an exhaust system to be used and where there is still a risk of inhaling asbestos dust, an approved respirator should be worn by the operative. The same steps to ensure adequate servicing arrangements should be taken as noted in 2.1.2. above.

3.2. Hand Cutting and Working

3.2.1. Where hand cutting and working has to take place regularly, a dust exhaust system will often not be possible. Where any risk of

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inhaling asbestos dust is present, operatives should wear approved-type respirators. (See section 2.1.2.).

3.2.2. Dust can be avoided by damping the material (e.g. by drip feeding) where the nature of the product permits.

3.2.3. Floors should be kept free of cutting dust, using portable industrial vacuum cleaning equipment. In the event of this not being available, the floor can be lightly sprinkled with damp sawdust immediately before sweeping up.

Notes

A Notes on the care and maintenance of respirators are being prepared and will be available from the Council separately.

B Notes on the medical examination of workers in the asbestos industry are available from the Council.

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