Removing asbestos-containing floor tiles and mastic

What this sheet covers
This sheet describes good practice when you need to remove floor tiles that contain asbestos.

These may also have asbestos-paper backing, or be fixed with asbestos-containing mastic.

Removal of floor tiles with an asbestos-paper backing will be notifiable non-licensed work (NNLW) – see sheet a0 Introduction to asbestos essentials.

Preparing the work area
- Restrict access – minimise the number of people present.
- Close doors. Use tape and notices to warn others.
- Ensure adequate lighting.

Equipment
- Warning tape and notices
- Class H vacuum cleaner (BS 8520) (if available – see sheet em4) for large areas
- Sharp knife
- Hammer
- Scraper
- Shovel
- Garden-type sprayer containing wetting agent
- Bucket of water and rags
- Asbestos waste bag
- Clear polythene bag

Floor tiles that contain asbestos can also have asbestos-paper backing, or be fixed with asbestos-containing mastic
Personal protective equipment (PPE) – see sheet em6

- Provide:
  - disposable overalls fitted with a hood;
  - boots without laces (laced boots are hard to decontaminate);
  - respiratory protective equipment (RPE).

Procedure

Overlaying

- Can you avoid removal, eg by overlaying with non-asbestos material?
- Warn the building owner about the presence of asbestos material you have covered by overlaying, so it can be managed properly.

Removal

- Place the scraper in the joint between the tiles. Lift the tile gently – try to avoid breakage.
- For firmly-fixed tiles, tap the scraper with the hammer.
- For a large tiled area, lift tiles using a shovel. This speeds up the job and avoids kneeling close to the tiles.
- Spray water under the tiles as they are lifted, to suppress dust and wet any asbestos paper that may be present. See also sheet a17.
- Wet any asbestos paper tile backing as the tiles are lifted.
- Gently scrape up adhering mastic. You can soften mastic with solvent, by warming with an infra-red lamp, or embrittle it with dry ice.
- Place debris in the asbestos waste bag.

Caution

Never sand the floor.

Other hazards

There may be other hazards – you need to consider them all.

Asbestos-containing mastic
Spray water under the tiles to suppress dust as you lift them gently, avoiding breakage

Cleaning and disposal

- Where you have removed only a few tiles, use damp rags to clean the floor. Clean larger areas with the Class H vacuum cleaner (if available) and/or damp rags.
- Clean the equipment with damp rags.
- Put debris, used rags and other waste in the asbestos waste bag and tape it closed.
- Put the asbestos waste bag in a clear polythene bag and tape it closed.
- Disposal – see sheet em9.

Personal decontamination

See sheet em8.

Clearance and checking off

- Visually inspect the area to make sure that it has been cleaned properly.
- Clearance air sampling is not normally required.
- Get the premises owner, dutyholder or client to check off the job.