

The Methodist Property Office - Resourcing Mission

Asbestos Risk Assessment

Asbestos issues are a very complicated area and although the Property Office is unable to offer detailed advice, the following general guidelines may be of some help to managing trustees. Essentially, it is a legal requirement (Control of Asbestos Regs, 2002) that the managing trustees have a “duty to manage” any risk from asbestos in church buildings. The first stage is to prepare a risk assessment to determine whether asbestos is present in your buildings, and if so, there are only two options: either the asbestos must be removed, or if it is considered to be of low risk, it can be sealed and left in position, together with warning notices (it may be possible to undertake minor repair).

The risk assessment should be carried out by a suitably competent person (not precisely defined in the legislation), and due to the risks involved we believe this should be by an independent professional who carries professional indemnity insurance, and not by a church member or volunteer. The person who carries out your quinquennial inspections should be prepared to offer at least initial advice (in our opinion, the presence of asbestos should already have been mentioned in quinquennial inspection reports, as it has been known for many years that asbestos is potentially dangerous.). The RICS (Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors) is at present establishing a certification scheme – the National Individual Asbestos Certification Scheme, and you can contact the RICS for further advice (www.rics.org, tel 020 7222 7000). The British Occupational Hygiene Society also publishes a list of consultants able to undertake asbestos surveys (www.bohs.org, tel 01332 29801). Managing trustees will of course need to agree the fees for such surveys, and also to agree with the surveyor the level of survey appropriate for their buildings – there are three types of survey, from basic assessment through to full access and sampling. Alternatively, a licensed asbestos removal firm in “Yellow Pages” could be contacted, but trustees need to be aware that as such estimates will normally be provided without charge, they may not be comprehensive and may not be considered to be a satisfactory “risk assessment”.

The Health & Safety Executive produce a lot of information about asbestos, and much of this is available on their web-site (www.hse.gov.uk – on the opening page you should find a menu box on the right hand side – click on “asbestos”). Perhaps the easiest document to understand is the HSE booklet "Management of asbestos in non-domestic premises - approved code of practice & guidance" (£9.50 from HSE Books, tel 01787 881165). This explains the Regulation 4 of the 2002 Regs. It is of course copyright information, so we cannot photocopy it and distribute it.

Managing trustees should also bear in mind that a risk assessment is needed in order to satisfy the conditions of your insurance policy.

We realise that these regulations may be imposing a considerable additional burden on local churches, but the government now believes that asbestos poses such a danger to health that it considers a risk assessment to be essential.