

Asbestos in soil

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Alec Hales maintains that new guidance provides essential advice for dealing with asbestos in soil and construction and demolition materials

Good information and detailed guidance has been available for some time for construction, health and safety, and property professionals who identify and manage asbestos-containing materials (AC Ms) in buildings.

Unfortunately this has not been the case for those dealing with asbestos in the ground, despite improved practices in the brownfield development and contaminated land sector.

Now this failure has been addressed with the publication of the comprehensive [CAR -SOIL guidance](#) , which provides authoritative information for working with soil and construction and demolition (C&D) materials that are, or may be, contaminated with been prepared with the support of the Health and Safety Executive, and offers a definitive explanation of how the legal requirements of the Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012 have asbestos.

Produced by sustainable land-use organisation CL:AIRE on behalf of the [Joint Industry Working Group](#) (JIWG), with the assistance of, and endorsement by, the Health and Safety Executive, the document presents a definitive explanation of what is required in order to comply with the [Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012](#) (CAR 2012) and is available to download free of charge from the [CL:AIRE website](#) .

When it is determined that asbestos could be present on construction sites, contaminated land or brownfield development sites, it is essential that employers, the self-employed and industry professionals understand how CAR 2012 affect them and what they should do to comply with the law.



Figure 1: Examining soil for asbestos

CAR -SOIL brings together comprehensive guidance on the measures to be taken by the geo-environmental and construction sectors, and their duty to ensure that workers and others are not exposed to asbestos as a result of work with soil and C&D materials.

Not suitably reviewing, risk-assessing and characterising a site for AC Ms might significantly increase a project's duration and cost and could also lead to workers and local residents being exposed to such materials.

Contamination competence

Some of the fundamental issues addressed in the new publication concern competence and training.

Unless it has been demonstrated that work will only be carried out on sites that are likely to be free of asbestos, regulation 10 of CAR 2012 requires that anyone liable to disturb asbestos, or who supervises employees who are likely to disturb it, should have the correct level of information, instruction and training that enables them to carry out work safely and competently.

The new guidance document makes it clear that the potential risks posed by asbestos in soil need to be assessed in accordance with environmental regulations, and that the contamination of sites by a potentially wide range of other substances may be an important additional consideration.

Overall competence in meeting the requirements of the planning regime may also be needed to satisfy the local planning authority, for example, that any risk of contamination will be addressed through comprehensive assessment and, if required, remediation.

CAR -SOIL points out that, where employees may potentially disturb asbestos in soil or made ground, specific information, instruction and training will be required that is relevant to the activities being undertaken. In addition, it is further recommended that this training should comprise written materials, oral presentation and practical demonstration as necessary. For example, the emphasis of current asbestos awareness training is on helping employees to avoid exposing themselves and others to the substance. The principle being applied here is that, should employees know how to identify potential AC Ms in the ground, they will then be able to stop work and prevent any chance of further disturbance and potential exposure.

CAR -SOIL takes things further and recommends that, to ensure workers are fully prepared on sites that could be potentially contaminated by asbestos, soil-specific asbestos awareness training should be provided.

It is proposed that, as well as more general asbestos safety-related topics, training should include information on the probable types and condition of AC Ms that might be encountered in soil and C&D materials, alongside how to avoid on-site risks with asbestos, and what procedures should be followed to deal with any emergency arising from uncontrolled disturbance of asbestos and release of fibres.

If work is planned that will necessarily disturb asbestos-contaminated soil and C&D materials on site ? including sampling of soils ? further information, special instruction and training appropriate to the work will also be needed at a level that goes beyond introductory asbestos awareness.

Training and tools

To support the publication of CAR -SOIL, CL:AIRE has also launched a training suite to support workers on site (see [CL:AIRE](#)).

The new guidance provides extensive information on the types of AC Ms encountered on brownfield and greenfield sites, and clarifies the type of work associated with managing their presence. Importantly, it also sets out useful definitions and examples of what might be regarded as non-licensed and licensed work, as well as related issues such as short duration work and sporadic and low-intensity exposure.

The JIWG has in addition developed spreadsheet-based decision tools that are available freely online to help assess potential risk and licensing status as part of the risk assessment and plans of work provisions, as set out in and required for compliance with CAR 2012. These tools are available for download from [CL:AIRE](#) .

The Joint Industry Working Group (JIWG) was established in November 2011 after the [Environmental Industries Commission](#) and CL:AIRE formally joined forces. The CAR -SOIL publication has been applied to work with asbestos-contaminated soil and construction and demolition (C&D) materials. The guidance is designed to be used as a companion document to the forthcoming JIWG Asbestos in Soil Code of Practice, which will set out in much more detail what constitutes good practice for assessing and managing risks from asbestos in soil and C&D materials. Alongside the JIWG, another steering group has been established by the Construction Industry Research and Information Association (CIRIA) to develop technical guidance on asbestos in soil and made ground. CIRIA aims to develop practitioner guidance on asbestos in soil that will provide a consistent approach for UK industry, stakeholders and regulators. CAR -SOIL has worked alongside CIRIA's research to ensure that the 2 projects are as coordinated as possible with one another.

Overall, in a step-by-step interpretation of CAR 2012, CAR -SOIL provides much-needed, definitive guidance in a carefully considered framework. It has been a long time in the making, but the construction industry now has comprehensive compliance advice on asbestos in soil and C&D materials, in the sort of detail to which those with duties relating to asbestos in building have grown accustomed.

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Further information

- Images ? Lucion
- Related competencies include [Contaminated land](#) , [Environmental assessment](#)
- This feature is taken from the RICS *Land journal* (May/June 2017)