Drilling holes in asbestos insulating board (AIB)

What this sheet covers

This sheet describes good practice when you need to drill into AIB to attach fittings, or to pass through cables or pipework.

This sheet is NOT appropriate if work lasts more than one hour per week for a worker, or two hours in total for two or more workers; use an HSE-licensed contractor for such work.

Preparing the work area

- Ensure safe access.
- Restrict access - minimise the number of people present.
- Close doors. Use tape and notices to warn others.
- If feasible, also restrict general access to the rear of the AIB.
- If this is not possible, warn the building owner that this area is contaminated.
- Ensure adequate lighting.

Equipment

- 500-gauge polythene sheeting and duct tape;
- warning tape and notices;
- Class H vacuum cleaner (BS EN 60335) - see sheet em4;
- drill - manual or powered, set at the lowest speed;
- drill bit, or hole cutter for holes greater than 20 mm diameter;
- plastic enclosure for vacuum cleaner nozzle, to extract around the drill bit;
- masking tape;
- thick paste, eg wallpaper paste or shaving foam, or a proprietary device to contain drilling debris;
- permanent sealant;
- plastic or metal sleeve to protect hole edges;
- bucket of water and rags;

Drill through paste or foam or use a plastic cowl and a Class H vacuum cleaner. A hand drill creates less dust. If you have to use an electric drill, put it on the slowest setting.
asbestos waste container, eg labelled polythene sack: and
clear polythene sack.

Personal protective equipment (PPE) - see sheet em6

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

Procedure

- Protect nearby surfaces from contamination. Cover with 500-gauge polythene sheeting and fix with duct tape to non-asbestos surfaces.
- Cover the drilling point and the rear (if accessible) with masking tape to prevent the edges crumbling.
- For cable and pipework, make the hole slightly bigger than required.

Method 1: drilling 1 to 5 holes up to 20 mm in diameter in board less than 6 mm thick

- Cover the drill entry and if accessible, exit points, with a generous amount of paste, foam or a proprietary device.
- Drill through the paste, foam or device.
- Clean off the paste, foam and debris with damp rags. Or remove the device and clean the surface. Clean the back surface with damp rags, if accessible.
- Rags and paste or foam contain dust and fibres. Dispose of as asbestos waste.
- Seal the drilled edge with sealant.
- Insert a sleeve to protect the hole’s edges from cabling, etc.

Method 2: drilling 6 to 20 holes, or any hole over 20 mm in diameter, or drilling through board more than 6 mm thick

- Place the plastic enclosure over the drill point. Put the drill bit or cutter through the enclosure opening.
- Attach the Class H vacuum cleaner hose to the plastic enclosure. Turn it on.
- Drill the hole.
- Vacuum the drilled hole, and the rear of the board if accessible.
- Seal the drilled edge with sealant.
- Insert a sleeve to protect the hole’s edges.

Cleaning and disposal

- Clean the equipment and the area with the Class H vacuum cleaner and/or damp rags.
- Put used rags, polythene sheeting and other waste in the asbestos waste container and tape it closed.
- Put the asbestos waste container in a clear polythene sack 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, duty-holder or client to check off the job.