

GL 286 – FAQs regarding asbestos in gauzes Ver. 5

This guidance has been developed in conjunction with the HSE to support schools in managing the issues surrounding asbestos in gauzes used in science practical work.

This guide is designed to be read in conjunction with HSE Guidance 'ADVICE TO USERS OF BUNSEN BURNER WIRE GAUZES THAT MAY CONTAIN ASBESTOS' and the full HSE Press release both of these are available to download from the CLEAPSS website.

You should make both your head of department and headteacher aware of these issues before carrying out any actions within the department.

The first action you should take is to stop using all gauzes, and prevent their further use within the department. This could be done by preventing access to cupboards or drawers where gauzes are stored by sealing them securely with tape. Alternatively trays of gauzes from open storage could be removed from labs, double bagged and stored securely. (Follow HSE Guidance EM 9 on how to do this <http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/guidance/em9.pdf>).

The following FAQs will help you implement the HSE guidance.

1. I am not sure where our gauzes have come from – we have used several suppliers in the past what should I do?
It would be appropriate to take a precautionary approach and respond as if at least some of these contained low levels of asbestos – follow the guidance from the HSE/DFE about how to dispose of the gauzes. This relates to all gauzes sold since 1976. (This is based on the DES (now DfE) AM 7/76, which required the removal of products containing asbestos from schools)
2. I have contacted my supplier(s) and they have told me that their gauzes are asbestos free – is this enough?
CLEAPSS advice is to ask to see a copy of a test certificate from a UK based testing organisation which is UKAS accredited for testing of bulk samples for asbestos and is working to HSG 248. The certificate should confirm that a sample of your gauzes have tested negative for asbestos.
3. I have contacted my supplier and they have sent me a copy of a non UKAS accredited certificate (e.g. IANZ certificate), letter and/or catalogue from their supplier stating that the gauzes are asbestos free is this enough?
No, non UKAS accredited test certificates, letters and catalogues from suppliers have been shown to be unreliable. See answer to question two.
4. Can I use the labs in the meantime?
Yes – Advice from HSE and research by others indicates that it is safe to carry on using science rooms as usual with the exception of the use of any suspect gauzes.
5. I have already used the gauzes this term what should I do?
Advice following consideration by HSE and others indicates that the risks are very low. However you should now stop using any suspect gauzes.
6. What about the effects from using the gauzes last term/last year/over the past 30 years?
Advice from HSE and research by others indicates that the risks are extremely low. The material is predominantly non asbestos. There would have been limited physical contact with the material during use (essentially placing items on top) and any contact is light and momentary. Consequently any free fibre release into the air will have been minimal for normal use.

7. What about the other equipment that is stored in the same close proximity to the gauzes?
See the HSE advice about sensible cleaning. Clean with damp rags and dispose of them as asbestos waste – following HSE guidance EM7 <http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/guidance/em7.pdf>
8. What about dust on other surfaces in the lab?
The advice from HSE is that deep cleaning is not required
9. Do I need to notify parents?
This is a matter for individual schools to decide. Headteachers should contact the employer, (governors / LA / MATs) for advice.
10. What should I tell parents concerned about the risks?
If you decide to inform parents about the issue it would be appropriate to adopt a reassuring stance, useful points to make include:
- Explain what the issue is – a picture of a typical gauze will help the audience understand what equipment is involved.*
 - Indicate that experts in HSE advise that any risks are small, but never the less you are taking the issue seriously.*
 - The issue has arisen through failings on the part of UK companies supplying equipment to schools – this is not something that a school could have foreseen.*
 - You are responding appropriately to the problem and are following the advice from CLEAPSS, DfE and HSE.*
11. Do I (teacher/technician/teaching assistant) need to get exposure to asbestos recorded on my medical records?
Advice from HSE indicates that this is not necessary in this case, but if you wish to then that is a personal choice.
12. I don't want to be involved in the clean-up - do I have to do it?
No – *if you do not feel confident that you can follow the advice given by HSE regarding how to safely dispose of gauzes you do not have to do this – your school could engage the services of a specialist contractor to carry out the work.*
Site services staff may have been trained in working with asbestos and such may feel confident in carrying out this work. Discuss with them either how best to carry out the work, or about them carrying out the work.
*It should be noted that the clean-up work is not classed by the HSE as 'licensed work', as such there is no need to use a licensed asbestos contractor for this aspect of the work. The transport and disposal of asbestos waste **is** a licensed activity and will need a licenced contractor. Refer to CLEAPSS Guide PS005 for companies who may be able to carry out such work.*
13. Who is paying for the disposal and replacement gauzes?
These costs will need to be met by the school.
14. How soon do I need to get the waste removed?
Once the material is double bagged and labelled as per the HSE guidance it can be stored securely ready to be included with the next collection of hazardous waste from the school.
CLEAPSS recommend timely disposal of all hazardous waste.
15. Heat proof mats used to be made from Asbestos (pre 1976), are we at risk from these?
This advice applies to gauzes only at this time.

