

Response to Email Query No.16 , Roof Sarking Felt, Raised: Sunday 2nd March 2014

Query Details:

Do you have any statistics regarding asbestos content in roof sarking felt? Our surveyors habitually sample sarking felt but I think the last positive result was actually several years ago (which make me wonder whether that was the result of a false positive/cross contamination?). Do NORAC members usually sample this and do they ever find any asbestos content? "

Feedback:

The query was sent out to all organisations on the circulation list for both northern and southern Norac groups. Details have been collated from those who responded.

LIST of Comments received from Members with regards to this query. Each comment has come from a different laboratory.

1. My experiences with sarking felt are that yes there are certain felts that contain it. With years of surveying/sampling and carrying out the analysis of my own samples I have managed to recognise sarking felts that are worth sampling. Although a very high percentage of these come back as negative it is worth getting enough evidence first to decide which types of felt you are going to sample. If in doubt sample it.
2. In response to the NORAC query, I have sampled this material throughout my career and cannot recall a time when the sample returned a positive result.
3. We have had several surveyors respond to the tune of it's always been negative.
4. We sample, as a 'historical' asbestos-containing product, though I cannot say the last time I saw a positive. Very, very few positives I would say.
5. I do not have any statistics but can state from a personal perspective that I have never had a positive result in over ten years of sampling sarking felt.
6. I have carried out a quick check of our bulk database of 17000 analyzed samples
I have 2015 items classified in the "Bitumen" group – approx 12%
Of these items 230 (approx 11.5%) were found to contain asbestos (chrysotile)
Some of these items are from external sources and identified only as a code number so I cannot identify the exact material identified, but of those I can identify –
43 (approx 19%) sink pads
24 (approx 10.5%) damp proof courses
31 (approx 13.5%) floor tiles with asbestos in the adhesive)
4 (approx 1.7%) floor tiles
8 (approx 3.4%) roof felt
6 (approx 2.6%) sealant

Care must be exercised when extrapolating from these figures as the population of properties sampled is not homogenous and included a range of property types, construction dates and material types. A company specializing in only domestic properties will have a different sample profile from a company specializing in industrial properties.

However the results indicate that isolated pockets of roofing felt containing asbestos (chrysotile) do exist. Whether the hazard arising from this material is significant enough for continued sampling is another question. 8 positive roofing felt samples out of 230 other positive samples of a relatively low hazard material hardly seems to warrant the cost of the sample and its continued management.

I carried out a further check to see if we had any results for sarking felt not included within the bitumen group. There are 2 further results – both negative.

7. We generally have about two to three social housing contracts running at any given time and always sample sarking felt and we do get positives, though not often. All the positives have been low content chrysotile. At one point we had a run on positives which turned out to be from one street of generic houses.
8. Just did a quick scan through analysis certificates for ‘Sarking’ and of 43 samples submitted to us, labelled as ‘Sarking’ felt, just one was positive. (Site in Painswick).
9. We always sample, but rarely find asbestos content.
10. I was just having this discussion last week with one of our surveyors I was out auditing.

We were looking at the old hessian type sarking felt in the loft of a 1970’s house and it opened up the debate of sampling protocol and frequency of positives finds.

The surveyor wasn’t going to sample it on the basis that he’d never found a positive and it just looked like the old hessian felt; which I agreed but for the sake of the audit he took a sample anyway (tested negative of course). Which did get me thinking that I can’t actually remember the last time I found a positive sarking felt. I have found positive before but can count on one hand the number of times I would think. [Roofing felt of course is a different matter and we regularly find positives].

11. I always understood positive type to date back to the 30’s or 40’s as indicated on the AIC tradename list. Serval is often talked about.

Serval Asbestos felt	75 to 96% chrysotile	1928 to 39	felt	Sarking underfelts and built up, plus fire resisting
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The HSE’s website and HSG264 also makes reference to Serval containing Chrysotile (no usage dates though). But serval is more often a flooring trade name term which doesn’t help (perhaps they made sarking felt too). And then with chrysotile being used in “felt” up to 1992 - do we also assume this includes sarking felt??.

12. Our policy is to only sample it if in doubt and based on skills, knowledge and experience which means the more experienced lads tend not to sample it whilst the less experienced ones do routinely sample.

13. Over many years we have sampled sarking felt from different building ages and very rarely does it contain asbestos. We now take a view that unless the scope of the survey includes a refurbishment of the roof we do not sample sarking felt routinely.
14. My colleagues say that they do sample sarking felt and very occasionally it contains asbestos. Our experienced surveyors might not sample felt that has clearly been replaced very recently, but we would train new surveyors always to sample felt. It may be that they are finding fewer asbestos containing sarking felt as roofs are replaced.
15. Sorry for the late response with regards to roofing felt. We still find traces in roofing felt; however it is only found in the older type. Barry the lab manager has informed me that he gets maybe the odd sample every couple of months, so in reflection on how many samples we take "not a lot"
16. Thomsons did some emissions monitoring work at a bitumen roofing felt plant in early 1992 and they were still just about using asbestos then as I remember. We sample it routinely and get positives occasionally. I also spoke to our lab who get samples from other organisations and they regularly get positives results too.

Summary:

It would appear that many organisations do sample roof sarking felt and whilst this does produce positive results this does not seem to be 'the norm' with the majority of samples returning negative results. It is also quite likely that the positive results will be from older buildings. The continued sampling in newer buildings, where negative results are more likely is more than likely resulting in a skewed perception i.e. it appears that very few roof sarking felts contain asbestos but this may well be that the majority of older felts do contain asbestos. If age was considered in more detail when deciding to sample (or not) then this may have the effect that a higher percentage of the felts sampled would be positive.

Colette Willoughby
4th April 2014