

Asbestos removal in and around Grenfell Tower: summary and Q&A from the 21 September event

Asbestos removal in and around Grenfell Tower: summary and Q&A from the 21 September event

At our online event on 21 September with Lancaster West residents, we explained about the asbestos removal that is taking place as part of planned safety works in, and close to, the Tower. People who attended the event were able to ask questions of the panel members, including the site management and community engagement teams, as well as one of the external contractors responsible for safety on site.

- Around 15 questions were posted from the community during the event and we have summarised these for you, grouping them into themes below.
- You can watch a video of the event [here](#).
- We will be holding our next information event on Tuesday 8 December. Please see further details for this at the end of this document.
- In early July, [we wrote to bereaved families and former residents of Grenfell Tower about safety works](#) that would begin in the Tower in early September. We also published a [Grenfell Community Update](#) about what this work will entail.
- In late July, we held our first online Q&A event about the works. The [write-up and event video](#) is available online.
- In September, we also published a [Grenfell Community Update](#) on the environmental checks and the next stage of soil sampling around the Grenfell Tower site.

About the safety works and asbestos removal

The fire caused some structural damage to the building. To support the building and to help with the police investigation, temporary 'props' (aluminium supports) were installed. There are currently more than 4,000 props inside the building, and they are monitored and inspected regularly by specialist engineering contractors. We now need to fit additional props so that we can ensure the building's continued safety.

We began some preparatory works in late July to enable the installation of these props. In September, specialists began removing large, heavy and damaged items from individual flats in the Tower, such as white goods and pipework. Later in the autumn, they will remove asbestos, which is mostly in the artex ceilings of individual flats.

We wrote to Lancaster West Estate residents in early September to let them know about work to convert 20 of the Lancaster West Estate garages into additional staff space, which we expect will take up to three months. This space is necessary because there will be more staff on-site and it will help us to follow COVID-19 guidance around social distancing and safe working. During the summer, we identified asbestos within the walls and ceilings of the garages, mainly in the cement slats, and not connected to the previous storage of debris.

The event panel

- Matt Hogan: Grenfell Tower site manager working for the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). Matt and his team manage the day-to-day coordination of activities on site and the safety works, to reduce the disruption to local residents that can be caused by this work.
- Sarah Hopping: a civil servant working in the community engagement team at MHCLG.
- Marc Smith: director at DeRisk, an external contractor for MHCLG looking after the health and safety aspects of the tower.
- Laura Williams: a civil servant in the community engagement and communications team at MHCLG.

Questions and answers

Thank you very much to all of you who submitted questions either to the panel or prior to the event. Here is a summary of the questions that we received, and the answers, which we have grouped into themes.

The type of asbestos in Grenfell Tower and nearby buildings on the estate

Q: What type of asbestos is present within the garages?

A: The slats between the window frames are made from asbestos cement – a mixture of chrysotile (more commonly known as white asbestos) and cement. There is also asbestos insulating board – a combination of chrysotile and amosite (brown asbestos). The type of asbestos products used in and around the Tower are very common, and what we would expect in a building of this age.

Safety precautions

Q: How will the asbestos removal be carried out safely?

A: A thorough survey has been conducted of the building and the garage area. The asbestos removal is being carried out by a licensed specialist removal contractor, which means they are licenced by the [Health and Safety Executive](#) – the independent regulator – and hold a three-year licence. The asbestos removal is carried out within the confines of a sealed enclosure. A ‘bubble’ is created wherever the asbestos removal is being carried out; this space is tested to ensure air cannot escape and this sealed enclosure prevents the movement of any asbestos fibres to the outside.

The contractors wear full-face respirators and disposable suits, which give a heightened level of protection to the operatives themselves. You are unlikely to see them from outside the site, however, if you do see people moving around the site wearing a different level of protection that you would normally see, please don't be alarmed. That protection is for the staff undertaking the works, and they go through a very rigorous decontamination process to go in and out of the sealed enclosure. The operatives will then move away from the work area in a different set of overalls to those worn inside the enclosure.

Q: What about air quality monitoring?

A: To provide reassurance to the community, asbestos air testing is being undertaken during all of the forthcoming works. The results of that air testing will be shared via the digital signs around the Grenfell Tower site. This testing is supplementary to the air quality monitoring that Public Health England has been doing since shortly after the fire, and which has not identified any fibre levels in air around the Tower. You can read that air quality data in [Public Health England's weekly monitoring reports](#). Finally, ‘personal air sampling’ is also being conducted to determine that the staff themselves have not been exposed to asbestos.

This robust regime of air monitoring that will demonstrate that the safety precautions being taken are effective. There is no increased risk as a result of the works; it is safe for people living, working and studying nearby to go about their normal daily lives and spend time outside.

(A further published report contains [Public Health England's evaluation of asbestos air sampling taken at the Grenfell Tower site between November 2018 and June 2019](#). This is the timeframe in which sealed

bags, containing material from inside the Tower, were transferred from the Grenfell Tower site garages to secure containers on Grenfell Road. While there is no safe level of asbestos and exposures should be kept as low as possible, it is considered by Public Health England that additional risks to public health from the storage and movement of the bags of material would be low.)

Q: Where will the asbestos be taken after it's removed from the site?

A: All asbestos waste will be removed according to Hazardous Waste Regulations and taken to a permitted landfill site where it will be disposed of safely. There won't be disposal of asbestos every day, so there will be some very short-term storage of the material in sealed containers on site. These containers will then be transported in a sealed wheelie bin to a sealed and locked waste skip. It is normal practice to use these 'asbestos skips' so that the material is fully contained and secure during the storage and removal process.

Q: How damaged is the asbestos in the Tower at the moment?

A: The condition of the asbestos varies from floor-to-floor. In some flats, there is no damage at all. The air monitoring plus our weekly inspections are keeping us informed of the condition of the asbestos, and both are also informing our plans to remove asbestos from the Tower later in the autumn.

Disruption caused by the works

Q: Will there be any respite for residents who live above the garages?

A: The garage conversion works are not expected to be particularly disruptive. There will be some drilling and some hammering, but not extensively and not during unsocial times. The works will take place from Monday to Friday, from 9am until 4.30pm, and with a break from 12:30 to 1pm.

The garage works themselves are expected to take around three months, and will be done sequentially, garage-by-garage. If we do find ourselves under a different set of COVID-19 restrictions, that may impact on the timing. Should this happen, we will update local residents.

If the works are affecting you, do please get in touch with us, using the contact details at the end of this document.

Q: How will the impact of the works will be managed to minimize the disruption to children at Kensington Aldridge Academy (the school overlooking the Grenfell Tower site)?

A: We are talking with Kensington Aldridge Academy, the leisure centre and Saint Francis of Assisi school, to make sure that places where children are playing or present are aware of the works that are going on.

While there is no elevated risk to children in those spaces, we want to make sure that those facilities are aware of the asbestos removal work happening. We appreciate the concerns and anxieties that people may have about that and want them to be able to take informed decisions about how they manage their own activities.

Q: What if something was to fall or be dropped from the Tower?

A: This would not happen. The broader set of safety works, and the asbestos-removal component of the works, are all inside the confines of the Tower or sealed-off work areas. There are no external works taking place. The Tower itself is a fully enclosed and wrapped scaffold, with a design that would prevent any falling materials. (Soon after the fire, any potential external debris that might pose any level of risk was also removed from the outside of the Tower at all levels.)

The future of the Tower

Q: Why not just take the Tower down instead of working on it for so long?

A: The Tower is currently safe and stable. To ensure the longer-term stability of the building we need to install some additional props. This is based on advice from specialist structured engineers and takes into account a thorough range of technical evidence, is informed by experts, and follows engagement with the community. Additional propping is needed, whatever the decision on the future of the Tower. The health and safety of the community remains our priority.

Q: How stable is the Tower?

A: The building is subject to 24-hour, 365-days-a-year monitoring. The building is fitted with sensors that detect and would inform us immediately of any movement. As mentioned above, the Tower is reinforced by more than 4,000 aluminium props, and these will be added to during the safety works to maintain the Tower's stability. Every single prop is checked three times a week. The series of props provides a robust system that is very effective.

Q: What is the evacuation plan for the walkways or the surrounding area?

A: The Tower is stable and the safety works will maintain its ongoing stability. In the unlikely event of an evacuation, the council, the Grenfell Tower site security team and the emergency services would coordinate a response. The council and other parties above are continuing to keep emergency planning arrangements under regular review and will keep residents informed should those arrangements change.

Miscellaneous

Q: Are the Tower's windows damaged?

A: A very small number of windows are damaged but do not pose a risk. Those that were badly damaged were dealt with early on as part of building stabilisation works. Those that remain are in a good condition and are subject to regular review and inspection to ensure that their condition doesn't deteriorate.

How to get in touch, or for more information

This is one of several regular updates that we will provide by email, online and post about these works as they progress. We will continue to work closely with local groups and organisations to ensure they have the information they need.

We understand that the works might cause distress or discomfort. We are available for conversations with you or your family and to answer any questions you might have.

- **For the site management team:** email GrenfellTowerSite@communities.gov.uk or phone **0303 444 0011**
- **We will begin holding monthly information events, with the first taking place on Tuesday 8 December, 6pm–7pm.** We will provide joining details for this event soon. Please email us if you would like us to email the link to you directly, or to send a specific question that you would like us to answer.
- **Telephone 'drop-ins' take place every Wednesday, 10am to 12noon:** phone **0303 444 9086**

The digital signs around the site will contain the latest information about the works. You can also read previous updates and letters about these safety works at: www.gov.uk/grenfell-community-updates.

To get in touch with the independent Grenfell Tower Memorial Commission:

- Email GTMCSecretariat@communities.gov.uk or phone **0303 444 4831**
- Visit www.grenfelltowermemorial.co.uk and join the mailing list via the [contact](#) page)

Grenfell Tower
Memorial Commission

Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (10 November 2020)