



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte  
Health Service Executive

Department of Public Health,  
HSE North-East,  
Railway Street,  
Navan,  
Co Meath.

Tel: +353 46 907 6412  
Fax: +353 46 907 2325

## What happened locally?

On foot of a recent fire at **Old Erne Palais, Belturbet, Co Cavan**, Cavan County Council is alerting local residents of the presence of asbestos in the aforementioned premises.

Cavan County Council has had air monitoring carried out in areas adjacent to the Erne Palais Ballroom. The purpose of the air monitoring was to check the ambient air for the presence of airborne asbestos. All air monitoring results are satisfactory.

## Asbestos

Asbestos is the name given to a group of fibrous minerals that occur naturally in the environment. Asbestos fibres are strong and heat resistant. However, it is now recognised that asbestos exposure can have serious health consequences.

Asbestos was extensively used as a building material from the 1950s as it was

ideal for fireproofing and insulation. As such asbestos fibres can be found in any house or building in Ireland built before the year 2000.

Intact and undisturbed asbestos does not pose a health risk. If asbestos containing products are disturbed in some way, fibres may be released. People are most likely to be exposed to asbestos fibres by breathing in fibres that are suspended in air.

## Health Effects

**People exposed to asbestos do not generally suffer any effects in the short term.** However, there are some conditions that can develop over time which are caused by asbestos exposure:

1. Asbestosis – scarring of the lung
2. Mesothelioma – a cancer of the lining of the lung
3. Asbestos-related lung cancer

Factors that increase the risk of asbestos-related conditions include; the type of

asbestos; the level of exposure, and the duration of such exposure. Those who are routinely exposed to asbestos fibres at work are at greater risk of developing an asbestos-related condition.

Smoking substantially increases the risk of lung cancer in those exposed to asbestos.

## Am I at Risk?

The potential for toxicity is greatest for those **working with asbestos**. There is no blood test that can be performed which will identify those previously exposed. As a preventative measure we would advise those potentially exposed to avoid smoking. If you have medical concerns, please contact your own GP and bring this leaflet. If you have queries for the HSE Environmental Health Department, (Call 049 437 3418). For any public health queries, please contact the Department of Public Health, HSE North-East, Navan, County Meath (Call 046 907 6412).

## What are the health risks associated with asbestos containing material?



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During the fire visible fragments of Asbestos Containing Material may have been carried in the smoke plume and may have been deposited on nearby properties, gardens and streets. However, as the majority of asbestos fibres are held tightly within the asbestos containing material they are not released into the air and this minimises the health risk (this is very much the case for this incident involving **Old Erne Palais, Belturbet, Co Cavan**). If this material however is handled, crumbles or is broken up and there is a chance that fibres are released in the air. It is only breathing in asbestos fibres that present a health risk. For this reason it is best not to handle the fragments yourself in case they break up in the process, but to leave this to specialists.

**I have debris from the fire on my property, or car what should I do?**

If you find ash and debris from the fire on your property or car you are advised to contact Cavan County Council (049 437 8409) for advice on how to proceed.

Offices are open from 9:15am to 5:00pm Monday to Friday. If there is evidence of debris in the garden you should avoid disturbing the material, for example do not mow the lawn until it has been cleared up and removed.

**If there is no risk from the debris, why do the clean-up teams wear full protective clothing?**

The clean-up operation will be done by specially trained cleaning contractors as there is the possibility that they will be exposed to asbestos dust on more than one occasion during clean-up procedures, their total exposure can be much higher than that of members of the public. For this reason they are required to wear protective equipment, such as dust masks and overalls, to minimise any potential intake of asbestos.

**When I handled some debris which landed in my garden, I think I may have breathed in some dust. What should I do?**

If you have breathed in dust it is likely to

be in a relatively small amount. **This single short-term exposure should not significantly affect your health.**

Asbestos is present in small quantities in both urban and rural air in the Ireland and so we are all breathing in small amounts of asbestos fibres over our lifetimes. The amount you may have breathed in from this one fire will be insignificant in comparison with our overall background exposure during the course of our lives.

**I have some dust and debris from the fire on my clothing, what should I do?**

If the clothing was drying in the garden at the time of the fire then as a precaution the clothing should be washed in lukewarm water for at least 10-15 minutes to remove any trace of asbestos fibres.