

Health & safety guidance for voluntary bat roost visitors: dangerous and hazardous substances

What are dangerous and hazardous substances?

There are a number of substances that you may come into contact with during the roost visit that can be categorised as dangerous or hazardous.

Some of these may be obvious and clearly labelled with appropriate warnings, but many may not always be obvious. The age and construction material of the property may affect the likelihood of coming into contact with some of these substances so it is important you make a careful assessment of the area in which you are visiting. Exposure to the substances, even in small quantities, can have a damaging effect on your health.

Hazards associated with animals and animal faeces are addressed in TIN157 *Animal-related disease* under [Publications for voluntary bat roost visitors](#).

Managing the risks

If you visit areas where dangerous or hazardous substances may be present:

- Identify and understand the various substances that may adversely affect your health.
- Avoid areas where you suspect any dangerous or hazardous substance to be especially if it may be disturbed by your activity.
- Wear the correct Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). and
- Make appropriate arrangements for hygiene and first aid.

What are the hazards?

Substance	Risk / danger
Asbestos	Carcinogen (cancer-causing)
Dusts, including silica & lead	Can cause & exacerbate respiratory conditions. Can cause irritation to the eyes & skin.
Fibres, including loft insulation	Can cause & exacerbate respiratory conditions. Can cause irritation to the eyes & skin.
Toxins such as vermin control measures	Can cause sickness and in extreme cases be fatal.
Marked hazards such as irritants, flammables & corrosives	Various health risks dependent upon hazard marking.

Identify and understand the hazard

Training

Ensure you have the right experience and training to go into these areas. Asbestos awareness training is available to VBRVs on the Skillport online learning system via the VBRV [Training page](#) of the Natural England website.

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Information

If possible, check with the building owner/ occupier / caretaker if they are aware of the presence of any hazardous substances. Make an assessment based on this information as to whether to go into the area and what potential PPE you might require.

Visually inspect the area:

Are there obvious signs of dust and debris?

Check for any marked / labelled substances

Visually check they are safe, sealed and not leaking. Avoid moving or disturbing these. Symbols include:



Flammable



Corrosive



Carcinogen



Irritant



Toxic

Avoid working where there are dangerous or hazardous substances

Always aim to work outside. Consider if it is possible to complete the inspection from the roost's exterior, perhaps using binoculars or cameras / endoscopy to capture evidence from the ground.

Use of the correct Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

PPE can play an important role in protecting you from some of the hazards. Examples include:

What	Protects against
Gloves	Dusts, fibres and debris causing skin irritation
Dust masks	Dusts, fibres and debris causing respiratory irritation
Goggles	Dusts, fibres and debris causing eye irritation
Overalls	Contact with hazardous substances onto personal clothing causing skin irritation

Be aware that visually similar products (eg dust masks) can offer varying levels of protection depending on their specification. There is more guidance available on PPE in TIN159 *Personal Protective Equipment* under [Publications for voluntary bat roost visitors](#).

Hygiene and first aid

You should consider the following:

- Arrangements for washing your hands after the visit and - importantly - before eating, drinking or smoking.
- Correct disposal of any gloves / coveralls which may have come into contact with a dangerous / hazardous substance.
- Carrying a small first aid kit to treat any minor injuries.

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Reporting an incident

You must report any accident, near miss or incident which occurs whilst performing or travelling to / from a roost visit to Natural England as soon as possible:

- Contact the Natural England 'near miss and incident reporting line' at any time on 0300 060 0100.
- If the incident results in injury to another person or damage to property please also contact: Martin Rhodes 0300 060 2676 or Lucy Foster 0300 060 0666.

Feedback

If you have any feedback about this guidance or would like to see additions / amendments please get in touch by emailing:
batvolunteers@naturalengland.org.uk

Further information

Please see our website page and other VBRV health and safety leaflets at:

[Health and safety for voluntary bat roost visitors](#)

Publications for voluntary bat roost visitors

Natural England Technical Information Notes are available to download from the Natural England website: www.naturalengland.org.uk.

For further information contact the Natural England Enquiry Service on 0300 060 0863 or e-mail enquiries@naturalengland.org.uk.

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