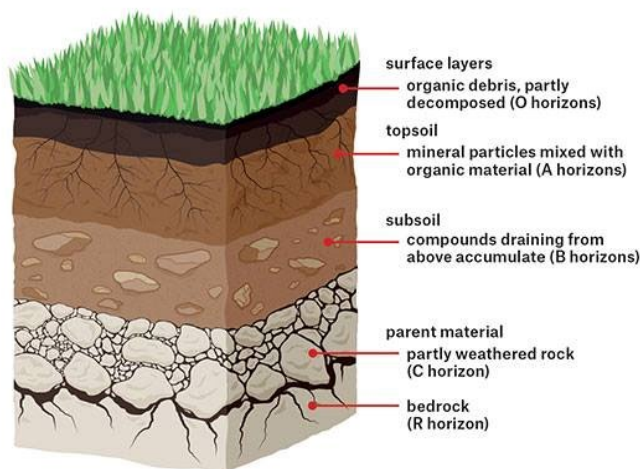




Topsoil Purchasing & Use Guidance

Topsoil is a valuable material consisting of mineral particles, organic matter, water and air that is needed to support plant life. Topsoil is the upper layer of soil and is usually between 5cm and 20cm in depth where it occurs naturally. Topsoil may be present on site prior to works commencing or may be imported from other sites or topsoil manufacturers for use within a defined specification.

Subsoil (the layers beneath topsoil) has a different composition, particularly in relation to the organic matter content, and does not provide the nutrients for plant growth that topsoil does.



Planning

Where topsoil is specified for use, whether it is pre-existing on the site or imported, it must meet the requirements of **BS 3882:2015 - specification for topsoil**.

If evidence of compliance with the British Standard is not available, arrangements must be made to have soils tested against the standard, and if necessary, asbestos screening should also be undertaken (e.g., where site investigations indicate a risk of asbestos).

Imported topsoil must be tested prior to delivery and be accompanied by the relevant test certification.

Where topsoil will be stripped and stockpiled for reuse on site this must be done in accordance with our internal earthworks and contaminated land standard and the British Standard. This is to ensure the material retains the properties required for it to be classed as topsoil.

Refer to EMS standard - Earthworks and Contaminated Land

Naturally occurring topsoil used on the site of origin for construction purposes (e.g., landscaping / planting within planning consent requirements) is not classed as waste.

Topsoil imported from soil manufacturers is not classed as waste but must meet the requirements of BS 3882:2015. Environment Agency guidance [Use of manufactured topsoil: RPS 190](#) states that you must not use more than 1,000 tonnes of manufactured topsoil.

In addition, evidence of asbestos screening should be obtained. Asbestos screening certificates should be provided for every 5000m³ of material that is imported. In relation to asbestos screening test results:

- Topsoil found to contain a visible fragment of asbestos containing material (ACM), where the concentration of asbestos in the piece of ACM is $\geq 0.1\%$ (weight for weight), or asbestos fibres at concentrations $\geq 0.1\%$ (weight for weight) will mean the soil must be rejected and disposed of as hazardous waste (special waste in Scotland).
- Topsoil found to contain asbestos fibres where the concentration of fibres is $< 0.1\%$ but $\geq 0.01\%$ must be rejected and disposed of as non-hazardous waste.
- Topsoil containing asbestos fibres at concentrations $< 0.01\%$ may be used further to risk assessment by a competent person (e.g. environmental consultancy) and with local planning authority approval.

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Topsoil imported directly from other construction / development sites is not classed as waste if it is imported under a Materials Management Plan developed using the [CL:AIRE Definition of Waste: Development Industry Code of Practice](#).

Topsoil imported directly from other construction / development sites without using the CL:AIRE Code of Practice is classed as waste (i.e. it was surplus to requirements on the site of origin).

In England and Wales, up to 1,000 tonnes of topsoil can be imported under a U1 exemption (from the Environmental Permitting Regulations) that has been registered with the Environment Agency (in England) or Natural Resources Wales (in Wales).

Refer to EMS standard – Waste Management

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