JUAC HEALTH & SAFETY REP ADVICE SHEET

ASBESTOS IN SCHOOLS

What is asbestos?

Asbestos is a name used for a range of minerals. There are three main types of asbestos; blue (crocidolite), brown (amosite) and white (chrysotile). The type of asbestos cannot be identified just by its colour. All types of asbestos can be dangerous.

Why is asbestos dangerous?

Asbestos is made up of thin fibres. Asbestos fibres are only dangerous if they become airborne and are breathed in, but ALL types of asbestos fibres are potentially fatal if the fibres are breathed and become stuck in the lungs and damage them. The main types of cancers caused by asbestos are cancer of the lung and cancer of the lining of the lung (mesothelioma). These diseases can take from 15 to 60 years to develop. There is no cure for mesothelioma.

Where do you find asbestos in schools?

Most school buildings built or refurbished before 1985 contain asbestos. From the 1950s it was used extensively for school refurbishment or new builds. The most common uses of asbestos in school buildings were:

- Spray fire insulation e.g. on structural beans and girders, roof sheeting, wall cladding, boiler flues, gutters, rainwater pipes, water tanks
- Insulation boards e.g. ceiling tiles, partitions walls, heater cupboards and equipment such as protective mats in laboratories;
- asbestos cement products such as wall and ceiling panels, corrugated roof panels, tiles, gutters, pipes and decorative plaster-type finishes.
- Lagging e.g. pipe work, insulating jackets for cold water tanks and boilers

What are the risks in schools?

How dangerous the asbestos is depends on the type of asbestos and the type of material it is contained in, the condition of the material and how likely it is to be disturbed. Asbestos material in schools is old and if it has not been properly maintained it is likely to be deteriorating. Also vandalism makes schools more vulnerable to the risk of release of asbestos fibres. In 2011 the government's advisory committee on science concluded that "safe" thresholds of exposure are not identifiable. 258 teachers in the UK died from mesothelioma between 1980 and 2005. In 2011 the Supreme Court confirmed a compensation payment to the family of a 49-year-old mesothelioma victim exposed to asbestos whilst a pupil at school.

The Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations 2006

Under the 2006 Regulations the duty to manage asbestos rests with the dutyholder. For maintained schools this is the local authority; for voluntary aided and foundation schools it is the governing body; and for independent schools, academies and other independent establishments it is the proprietors, governors or trustees. Whilst ultimate responsibility remains with the dutyholder, the practical task of managing the asbestos can be delegated to the school. The dutyholder must ensure that those individuals to whom the task has been delegated are trained and competent in managing the asbestos in the school. Asbestos management should follow normal risk assessment practice in the same way as any other hazard. The Regulations require a written asbestos management plan setting out what steps are to be taken to manage the asbestos. A basic first step in asbestos management is to identify the extent, type and condition of asbestos in a building so that measures can be taken to ensure that it is safely managed.

Asbestos Survey

The duty holder must take reasonable steps to find out if there are materials containing asbestos in the premises and, if so, how much, where they are and what condition they are in. This is usually done by a person competent carrying out an asbestos survey. The survey should cover all parts of the building and the results of the survey should be recorded in an Asbestos Register and the information provided to anyone who may work on, or disturb, these materials.

ACTION POINTS

- Check all asbestos has been identified, recorded and marked
- Check all asbestos is in good condition/sealed and monitored

Asbestos Management Plan

Your school should have written plans setting out how the risks from any potential asbestos materials are to be managed. They should include:

- a policy statement and management procedures;
- a timetable and priorities for action on removal or encapsulation;
- arrangements for monitoring materials left in place;
- staff responsibilities;
- arrangements for informing and training staff, including contractors;
- dealing with emergency situations;
- review arrangements.

ACTION POINTS

- Request a copy of the Asbestos Register and Asbestos Management Plan (AMP)
- Undertake regular work inspections using the Asbestos Register and AMP
- Check the AMP is kept up-to-date and has been clearly communicated to all staff
- Check the Plan is being followed and is reviewed at least annually

Contractors

Maintenance or building work can easily damage asbestos materials. Stringent measures are needed to ensure that contractors are trained, know of the presence of asbestos and are tightly controlled. A suitable risk assessment carried out by a competent person should be made before carrying out any work which may expose occupants to asbestos. There should be a plan of work which sets out:

- the location of any asbestos;
- how the work will be carried out;
- how waste will be removed;
- how the work will be monitored;
- how staff will be kept informed.

ACTION POINTS

- Check the contractor is competent
- Request a copy of the risk assessment and work plans
- Report any concerns immediately to the duty holder, keep records of the concerns and any action taken

Information, Instruction and Training

Your Employer must provide adequate training (which includes information and instruction) to all employees who are or who are liable to be exposed to asbestos, or who supervise such employees. The training must be given at regular intervals. It needs to be proportionate, it should contain the appropriate level of detail and it should be suitable to the individual's role and responsibilities.

Exposure

Your Employer has a duty to prevent exposure so far as is reasonably practicable. If asbestos is indentified as being in a deteriorated or damaged condition, the immediate action is to evacuate and seal the area off immediately. Your Employer should have arrangements to deal with accidents, incidents and emergencies.

ACTION POINTS

- Request a copy of the schools arrangements for dealing with asbestos incidents
- Check all staff know what the school's arrangements are and who is responsible for what
- Advise anyone who suspects that they may have been exposed to contact their GP and Union
- Discuss with the employer occupational health support and surveillance
- Fully record the incident, take part in the investigation, request a copy of the final report and record all action taken
- Request a copy of any HSE report or recommendations

Governors /Parents

Governors are responsible for monitoring and evaluating heath and safety of the school. Parents have an interest in the safe management of asbestos in schools.

ACTION POINTS FOR GOVERNORS and PARENTS

- Ask to see the Asbestos Register and Asbestos Management Plan
- Check the Plan is being followed and is reviewed at least annually
- Ask to see the schools arrangements for asbestos incidents

If you're interested in finding out further information, please email Julie Winn (julie.winn@juac.org.uk).

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