



2017 General Election – JUAC’s Priorities for Asbestos in Schools

Background

Founded in 2010, the Joint Union Asbestos Committee is a non-party political group that seeks to protect school workers and children from the dangers of asbestos by raising awareness and campaigning for improved asbestos management in schools. Our long term goal is the removal of all asbestos in schools, starting with the most dangerous first.

The latest estimate is that 86% of schools in England and Wales contain asbestos, and much of this asbestos is in locations accessible to pupils and staff. Since 1980 at least 319 teachers have died from mesothelioma, a cancer associated solely with exposure to asbestos. Teachers are now dying from mesothelioma at an average of 17 per year, compared to 3 per year in 1980.

Schools are unlike other workplaces because the majority of their occupants are children who are known to be more vulnerable to asbestos exposure. For instance, a child exposed to asbestos at age five, is five times more likely to develop mesothelioma than an adult exposed at age 30.

Most members of staff are not told whether their school contains asbestos, so they cannot take steps to avoid disturbing it. Even fewer parents are told whether asbestos is present in their child’s school. It is much more difficult to manage asbestos in schools than in other workplaces. This is because normal school activities routinely disturb asbestos. Much of the asbestos in schools is old and in a deteriorating condition, this makes it even harder, or even impossible to avoid fibres being released.

In 2015, the Government published the long awaited findings of its policy review of asbestos management in schools. JUAC welcomed the DfE’s acknowledgement that asbestos in schools was an issue; however, the review’s recommendations did not go far enough. There was no commitment from the Government that it would implement a phased removal of asbestos in schools. JUAC believes that the 2017 General Election represents an opportunity for all political parties to make a clear commitment to making our schools safe from the dangers of asbestos.

JUAC calls on all political parties to include the following commitments in their manifesto:

1. To collect data centrally on the extent, type and condition of all asbestos in schools.
2. To use this data to develop a programme for the phased removal of all asbestos in educational establishments, starting with the most dangerous first, by no later than 2028.



3. To provide adequate capital funding for all asbestos to be removed via this national programme..
4. In line with commitments made by the Government in the 2015 Asbestos Policy Review to prioritise the development of school specific risk assessments, asbestos air tests and environmental levels which take into account the vulnerability of children to asbestos exposure.
5. To support duty holders by providing funded mandatory training, and adequate support and funding from the government for asbestos management and removal.
6. To encourage a policy of openness about asbestos in schools, with parents, teachers and school staff being updated annually about the presence and condition of asbestos in their school and the steps being taken to manage it.

JUAC is seeking the following pledges from all Prospective Parliamentary Candidates:

1. Will you commit to pursuing a national policy for the phased removal of all asbestos from educational establishments, starting with the most dangerous first, by no later than 2028?
2. Will you support, in the interim, steps to inform the public about the wide prevalence of asbestos in schools, and work to create a climate of openness and transparency where all schools are encouraged to publish an annual report about the type and condition of all asbestos in the premises, to be shared with all parents, staff and stakeholders?
3. Will you support work to identify schools within your constituency that contain asbestos, and will you use your position to support schools to manage and, where appropriate, seek funding to remove it, and make this information available to your constituents?
4. Will you work with school staff and parents in your constituency to campaign for improved asbestos management in all schools and asbestos removal wherever possible?