



Asbestos in Schools Why Management Just Isn't Working

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ASBESTOS CAMPAIGN

- **Joint Union Asbestos Committee (JUAC)**
 - NUT, ATL, NASUWT, ASCL, NAHI, GMB, Unite, Unison, Right to Know (Wales)
- **Asbestos in Schools Group**
 - Chaired by Rachel Reeves MP
 - Founded in 2007 by Michael Lees MBE
 - Wider membership than JUAC
- Both groups campaign to make schools and colleges safe from the dangers of asbestos. In the short term – effective management. Long term – all asbestos removed from schools, most dangerous first

GOVERNMENT POLICY

HSE view:

- Schools deemed to be 'low risk'
- Generally safer to manage asbestos in schools rather than remove.
- But no proactive inspections to check whether this policy is working.

WHY ARE CHILDREN MORE AT RISK?

In 2013 the Government's Committee on Carcinogenicity ruled that children exposed to asbestos were more at risk of developing mesothelioma because of their greater life expectancy

Professor Julian Peto has estimated between 200 and 300 adults per year die because of childhood exposure at school in the 60s and 70s

EVIDENCE THAT THE POLICY IS NOT WORKING

- NUT's 2017 Survey of Members
- Responses to FOI requests to LAs and Academies

FINDINGS OF MARCH 2017 NUT ASBESTOS SURVEY

- Nearly 50% had not been told whether their school contained asbestos
- Of those whose school contains asbestos:
 - Half had not been told where it was located
 - Nearly 75% said asbestos was accessible to staff and children
 - 85% had not seen the AMP
 - Over 75% were aware of asbestos exposure incidents
- Almost half were not aware of HSE advice that WW1 or 2 gas masks should not be used in schools

EXAMPLES OF POOR MANAGEMENT

'School will not tell me if there is asbestos in my classroom. There are big chunks of plaster missing out of the walls. Children pick at this during lessons'

'Asbestos in a toilet used by staff and sometimes by an SEN pupil'

'The whole tower block was exposed asbestos. Pupils were sent home for the day while workers came in to tape over the exposed areas'

'Just the other day a colleague of mine said 'I can't hang work from the ceilings, every time I touch a ceiling tile, asbestos falls on me''

'Asbestos was found in my DT workshop last week and we were not allowed to enter for 30 minutes while it was covered up with tape!'

'Three ex-members of staff, dead or dying from mesothelioma, there is obviously a concern among long-serving staff about historical exposure to asbestos.'

MORE EXAMPLES OF POOR MANAGEMENT

'Children regularly punch holes in walls and dig holes in plaster covering the asbestos'

'Chair was thrown through the wall by a pupil. Wall was insulated with asbestos'

'Asbestos management seems very lax and if anyone raises a concern or issues it is either laughed at by the head or we are told off for mentioning it'

'Asbestos has been found twice next to and in my teaching room. I have raised concerns about it but do not feel my concerns have been taken seriously and have not been fully informed of the risks. The first time I was left teaching in my room with only a blue sheet protecting me and my class from exposure. I raised concerns at the time, especially because I was pregnant, but I was told there was no risk to mine or the children's health'

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUESTS TO LAs IN ENGLAND AND WALES

- 135 councils responded
- 105 incidents of exposure in last 5 years
- 230 claims brought with 108 settled and 122 outstanding
- Over £10m paid out in compensation
- 12,500 schools containing asbestos

All of this likely to be an under estimate as some LAs withheld information or said they didn't hold it, or asked for payment. Some refused to answer any questions on data protection grounds.

**ISSUES HIGHLIGHTED BY ASBESTOS
FOI REQUESTS TO LAs**

- ▶ Some LAs did not respond to the request or refused to provide the information
- ▶ Some LAs provided information we know to be inaccurate
- ▶ Some passed responsibility onto the individual schools
- ▶ Some did not hold information about asbestos in their schools!

FOIs TO MATs – Work in Progress

- ▶ May 2017 – Nearly 1200 MATs in operation
- ▶ So far, over 700 have been contacted – FOIs submitted in Feb/March 2017
- ▶ Around 400 MATs have responded to date
- ▶ Of these 400, nearly 2000 schools contain asbestos.
- ▶ 45 known incidents of asbestos exposure since schools became academies
- ▶ Did not hold information about schools prior to conversion
- ▶ Numerous reports of previously unknown asbestos being discovered

**ISSUES HIGHLIGHTED BY FOIs TO
MATs**

- ▶ Some refused to provide the information or asked for payment
- ▶ Some did not hold central records about asbestos in their academies – in their complications with PFI arrangements
- ▶ Some instances of inaccurate information being passed from LA to MAT
- ▶ Some academies did not have AMP in place prior to audit, or AMP was inadequate
- ▶ Overall – Lack of consistency in management across MATs, and when conversion takes place
- ▶ Some responses highlighted good practice but not replicated every where
- ▶ Some appeared to have audited the AMP exactly the time our request was submitted!
- ▶ Highlights problems with increasing fragmentation of education and the need for a central register of asbestos location and condition for every school

**EVIDENCE GIVEN TO PUBLIC
ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE**

Phil Keay, former head teacher at Hetton School in Sunderland told the PAC enquiry into the condition of school buildings that pupils in the school had to go through a 'fumigation van' to be 'de-dusted' and 'hosed down' because of asbestos fibre release.

He said this happened on more than one occasion.

Chairman of the Educational Building and Development Officers Group said such situations are 'fairly typical'.

JUAC Demands

- ▀ Central collection of data on extent type and condition of all asbestos in schools.
- This data to be used to develop a programme of planned removal, starting with the most dangerous first, by 2028.
- Adequate funding to cover the costs of removal.
- Mandatory training for duty.
- The prioritisation of the development of school-specific risk and environmental levels which reflect the vulnerability of children.
