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Attention: News desk, Industrial, Health

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Unions in the North East help asbestos victims receive £3.8 million

Asbestos is the biggest cause of workplace deaths. Last year 5,000 people were likely to die prematurely as a result of asbestos exposure. This is around three times the number of road accident deaths. Most of those who die do so as a result of mesothelioma, a kind of cancer that can be caused by very low levels of exposure. Tragically it is always fatal.

Almost all of the people who are dying today were exposed to asbestos decades ago, so asbestos is now often seen as being a problem of the past as its importation and use have been banned since 1999.

That is not the case. The dangers of asbestos are still with us. Asbestos-containing materials can be found in around half a million non-domestic premises (and probably around a million domestic ones).

This means that people are still being exposed to asbestos. It is often people who are working in maintenance, refurbishment or demolition, but people can, and do, become exposed simply by working in a building with asbestos, as fibres can become dislodged and breathed in.

This killer is often hidden or has not been identified as asbestos. As a result it can be found in factories, homes, schools, shops, hospitals, offices, restaurants etc.

Most of these diseases take many years to develop and so deaths occurring now are largely a result of past workplace conditions.

A total of £3.8 million has been secured for asbestos victims and their families in the North East and North Cumbria between April 2016 and September 2017. The Northern TUC Asbestos Support and Campaign Group (ASCG) was launched in 2010 and has helped its clients claim the money during the past 17 months, which includes benefit gains and compensation.

The group, a partnership between Northern TUC, Macmillan Cancer Support, trade unions and West View Advice and Resource Centre, provides support, advice and information (including help with benefit entitlements) to people living with the effects of asbestos exposure, their families and carers. People helped by the group have asbestos-related diseases such as mesothelioma, asbestosis and lung cancer and other workplace cancers.

A client who has benefited from the service said: “Given all the emotional and energy draining day to day happening that a diagnosis of cancer ultimately generates for the sufferer and their family, form filling and bureaucracy is the last thing they are wanting to prioritise.

“Your wonderful, cheerfully practical approach to these important matters gave us both a welcome sense of wellbeing in an area so unfamiliar and daunting to us. Please keep up the good work as we assure you it is appreciated and valued very much by us and many others.”

Val Evens, Manager of West View Advice and Resource Centre Limited, said: “We welcome the opportunity to extend our services and partnerships to incorporate the Northern TUC and the Macmillan Industrial Benefits Adviser. We know that through working together with our partners we will ensure this valuable service continues helping people suffering from industrial cancers right across the north east.”

Beth Farhat, Northern TUC Regional Secretary said: “Results like these are amazing and highlight the need for groups like the ASCG. Unfortunately, the legacy of asbestos is going to be with us for some time to come so it is imperative that there is free access to good quality, easily accessible support and guidance for those who need it.

“We are also looking to develop this area of work further and widen the scope of the group to help even more people – taking the service directly into workplaces, briefing and training union Reps.”

Contact the Northern TUC Asbestos Support and Campaign Group – telephone: 01429 271294, email: West View Advice & Resource Centre, reception@wvarc30.org.uk or visit the website <http://www.ascg.org.uk/>

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