



Asbestos in Schools: The need for action

Sarah Lyons
Principal Officer
Pay, Conditions and Bargaining
National Union of Teachers

Why is asbestos in schools such a concern?

- 86% of schools in England contain asbestos
- It's more easily disturbed than in other buildings
- Teacher deaths are increasing (3 in 1980, 16 in 2011, 22 in 2012)
- How many pupils are dying as adults because of school exposure?

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

How is the campaign organised

- Asbestos in Schools Group
 - Chaired by an MP (Rachel Reeves)

members include MPs, unions, victims groups, asbestos experts, local authority representatives, Hazards Campaign
- Joint Union Asbestos Committee
 - NUT, NASUWT, ATL, VOICE, NAHT, ASCL, GMB, UNISON, UNITE, UCATT

What have we achieved so far?

- Establishment and continuation of DfE Asbestos in Schools Steering Group
- DfE Review of Asbestos Policy for Schools
- Revised DfE Guidance for Schools
- DfE property data survey and accountability questionnaire to head teachers
- Advice on Gas Masks in Schools
- Advice on warm air cabinet heaters in schools
- Risk Protection Arrangement

Findings of March 2015 NUT Asbestos Survey

- 44% of respondents had not been told whether their school contained asbestos
- Of those who did know, 40% had not been told its location
- More than 80% said parents had not been given any information about asbestos present
- Only 15% of those who knew their school contained asbestos had seen the asbestos management plan
- Two-thirds were unaware of the dangers posed by vintage gas masks

Examples of Poor Management

“A wall was removed by builders. It was discovered when they tried to dispose of the rubble. It meant the building was closed for a long time while specialist cleaned and disposed of everything affected.”

“TA putting staples into the ceiling and then being told afterwards that the ceiling contained asbestos.”

“The first I knew about it was when a caretaker came into my room with a pot and paintbrush and when I said “oh I didn’t know my room was being decorated” he answered “it’s not, I’m sealing the asbestos panels.””

“Someone drilled a hole in it to put a clock up.”

“The door of my laboratory has an exposed asbestos lining. I stood at that door at the start and end of every lesson for ten years, greeting students before someone pointed out to me that the asbestos surface has been broken. Within a week the door was replaced and now all similar doors within the school have also been replaced. I can’t help but be concerned about this.”

Michael Lees



The Future?

- National programme of widespread air sampling to monitor fibre levels
- A school-specific environmental level
- A school-specific risk assessment to account for the increase risk of disturbance in schools
- A major national conference for stake holders to take place in 2017

JUAC

Further Information

Julie Winn, Chair

07920 514 254

www.juac.co.uk

jwinn@juac.co.uk

www.juac.org.uk

www.teachers.org.uk