

Thousands of staff and pupils potentially at risk as local authorities and schools fail to show that they manage asbestos safely.

The publication of a report from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) report on 'system built' schools (21 September 2010) highlights the need for better asbestos management, according to the Asbestos in Schools group (AiS).

Although the HSE press release asserts that the majority of local authorities are complying with official guidance, it also shows that a significant number are not managing their asbestos effectively, with a quarter of the 42 inspected requiring enforcement action to be taken through the issuing of 18 improvement notices and one prohibition notice.

These findings confirm AiS's concerns that a significant proportion of schools are not managing their asbestos effectively.

In February, a report published by the asbestos consultants' association ATaC of their inspections of a sample number of schools found serious flaws in asbestos management. Their report reflected what their members find in many schools up and down the country, as the chairman of ATaC stated: *"These are not minor problems that have crept in over recent years; rather they are fundamental problems that are endemic in schools in the UK."*

Michael Lees said: "The HSE inspections identified that a lack of asbestos training was a common weakness in a number of the local authorities and schools they inspected. This is one of the areas that AiS had previously identified as being a widespread problem in schools, and one that has to be urgently addressed if they are to stand any chance of effectively managing their asbestos."

"The questionnaire and inspections have concentrated on one particular asbestos problem in one type of school building. It did not attempt to assess standards in traditionally built schools, it gained no information on independent schools, and 95% of dioceses, who are in the main the owners of the Voluntary Aided Schools, simply failed to reply.

"There is a serious problem of asbestos fibre release in system built schools. The problem was first discovered in 1987 in Wandsworth when dangerous levels of asbestos fibres were ejected into the rooms when a door was slammed or a wall hit. A warning was not issued and nothing was done to prevent the fibres being released in the other 13,000 system built schools in the country. In 2006, similar problems were found in a system built school in Wales and warnings and guidance were finally issued. It is unacceptable that, 23 years after the problems were first discovered, a significant number of schools and local authorities have failed to take the necessary measures to protect their staff and children from the dangers of asbestos in these schools.*

"This new HSE report highlights that many schools and local authorities are still not safely managing their asbestos and underlines the urgent need for all the schools and authorities in the country that are not adequately protecting their occupants from the dangers of asbestos, to be identified and then brought up to a safe standard.

"The previous Government recognised that measures have to be taken to improve the asbestos management in schools by establishing an expert Steering Group under the Department for Education to recommend practical measures that will achieve this. The Coalition Government has not yet confirmed that the Steering Group will continue. This report shows that it is essential that it does."

Notes for Editors:

HSE “Majority of local authorities satisfy asbestos management rules in ‘system build’ schools”^[3]

Tuesday, September 21, 2010. <http://news.hse.gov.uk/>
<http://www.hse.gov.uk/press/2010/hse-asbestosinschools.htm>

ATAC report:

<http://www.asbestosexposureschools.co.uk/pdfnewslinks/ASSESSMENT%20OF%20ASBESTOS%20MANAGEMENT%20IN%20SCHOOLS%20ATAC.%2022%20FEB%202010.pdf>

Voice survey, lack of training:

http://www.voicetheunion.org.uk/index.cfm/page/_sections.contentdetail.cfm/cid/1752/navid/570/parentid/330

Analysis of questionnaire

<http://www.asbestosexposureschools.co.uk/pdfnewslinks/DCSF%20QUESTIONNAIRE%20TIMESCALE%2014%20Nov%2009.pdf>

* See [Release of asbestos fibres in System Built schools part 1](#) [Release of asbestos fibres in System Built schools part 2](#)

The Asbestos in Schools Group (AiS) is a group of organisations and individuals concerned about the dangers of asbestos in schools. The group is non-party political and is under the auspices of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Safety and Health.

Its expertise covers all aspects of asbestos in schools, and its support is widespread and increasing. Amongst the group’s members and supporters are MPs, all six of the teaching trade unions, the three school support staff unions, the asbestos consultants’ association, experts on risk, solicitors, doctors, the asbestos victims support forum, the health and safety campaigning organisation Hazards, the Independent Schools Bursars Association and individuals including those who have been effected by the devastating result of asbestos exposure in schools. The group’s overall aim is to make schools safe from the dangers of asbestos