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Asbestos management in schools



Guidance

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Asbestos management in schools

Audience	Local authorities; headteachers; school governors; members of school management teams.
Overview	The purpose of this guidance note is to ensure that headteachers, school governors and other members of the school management team are aware of requirements in respect of asbestos management procedures and legislation.
Action required	<p>School management teams need to ensure that maintenance, repair work and improvements on school buildings are carried out safely. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• precautions for staff and visitors to follow• appropriate training for staff and clear lines of accountability established where health and safety functions are delegated• all work on buildings being carried out only after consulting the documentation on asbestos• any work likely to affect asbestos-containing materials being carried out by a qualified person. This should take place after consultation with those who have duty-holder responsibilities, such as the employer, the governing body, or the building owner.
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Additional copies	<p>This document can be accessed from the Welsh Government's website at www.21stcenturyschools.org/?skip=1&lang=en</p>

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this guidance note is to ensure that Headteachers, school governors, and other members of the school management team are aware of requirements in respect of asbestos management procedures and legislation.

School management teams need to ensure that maintenance, repair work and improvements on school buildings are carried out safely. This includes:

- Precautions for staff and visitors to follow
- Appropriate training for staff and clear lines of accountability established where health and safety functions are delegated
- All work on buildings is carried out only after consulting the documentation on asbestos, and
- any work likely to affect asbestos-containing materials is carried out by a qualified person. This should take place after consultation with those who have duty-holder responsibilities, such as the employer, the governing body, or the building owner.

2. Responsibility – Health and Safety Executive, local authorities and governing bodies

The management of asbestos is a non-devolved matter for which responsibility lies with the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). Enforcement of the relevant regulations - the Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012 (“the Regulations”) - is the responsibility of the HSE and local authority environmental health officers.

The duty to managing asbestos in schools, including its removal if appropriate, rests with those responsible for the maintenance of schools, including (in the case of community schools, for example), the relevant local authority. As the building owner and employer, local authorities, governing bodies and/or Headteachers are required to comply with the Regulations. They have the duty to manage the asbestos in the school and to protect those using or working in the building. This includes setting health and safety policies, standards and systems to monitor completion.

It is essential that duty holders, such as head teachers, ensure they are aware of their duties under the regulations. Local authorities can advise on how this duty is being discharged in their area.

3. The legislative framework

The Health and Safety at Work Act etc 1974 requires employers to protect their employees at work. In schools, it also requires that “pupils, visitors and all other persons are protected from harm to their health and safety from known or foreseeable risks so far as is reasonably practicable”.

The Regulations place specific duties on those who manage non-domestic premises to identify the presence of asbestos-containing materials, and manage the risks they present. The Regulations also place duties on other persons such as contractors, for example, to protect their employees.

If you are responsible for the maintenance, repair or improvement of school premises, or of equipment that uses asbestos-containing materials, you will have responsibilities under the duty to manage asbestos.

4. Who is the dutyholder?

Anyone who has an obligation for the maintenance or repair of non-domestic premises by virtue of a contract or tenancy is a dutyholder as defined in Regulation 4. If there is no person with such an obligation, then the dutyholder is the person who has control of the premises or any means of access to and from them. For most schools, the main dutyholder will be the employer, with dutyholder responsibilities in some schools also being shared with the person responsible for the site.

- **The local authority is the employer for community schools, community special schools, voluntary-controlled schools, maintained nursery schools and pupil referral units.**
- **The governing body is the employer for voluntary-aided and foundation schools.**
- **For independent schools, the employer may be the proprietor, governors or trustees.**
- **Where budgets for building management are delegated to schools, for example by a local authority, the duty to manage asbestos will be shared between the schools and the local authority.**

Dutyholder responsibilities are often established via an explicit funding agreement/contract. The extent of the duty depends on the nature of the agreement and responsibilities for repairs and maintenance, as distinct from capital expenditure.

In the case of local authorities, a written scheme for the financing of maintained schools will set out the categories of work that will either be financed from the delegated school budget share (revenue repairs and maintenance) or remain the responsibility of the local authority (capital expenditure). Both parties will then have dutyholder responsibilities for the repair and maintenance of the premises.

Where the duty is shared, cooperation and communication between all parties is essential to the effective management of asbestos-containing materials.

5. Dutyholder responsibilities

The management of asbestos in schools, including its removal if appropriate, rests with those responsible for the maintenance of schools.

In practice a duty holder's responsibilities in a school include:

- Keeping an up-to-date record of the location and condition of asbestos containing materials (ACMs);
- Assessing the risk from any ACMs in the school;
- Having a written asbestos management plan with actions and measures necessary to manage the risks from ACMs;
- Putting those plans into action; and
- Making information available to workers who may disturb asbestos (e.g. contractors or maintenance workers).

The HSE identifies that persons most at risk of disturbing materials containing asbestos and breathing in the fibres are tradespeople and caretakers.

However, if fibres are released because work is not properly managed, the staff and pupils in a school could be exposed.

Other activities could also lead to accidental exposure. The school must have arrangements in place to ensure that information about the location and condition of materials containing asbestos is given to anyone who might disturb these materials, including caretakers, contractors, support staff and teachers.

All parties in the school management chain have a part to play in securing the effective management of asbestos in school premises.

These management arrangements must also be effective during school closure periods when school staff presence is minimal.

6. What is asbestos and when does it become a risk?

Asbestos is a natural mineral material with a fibrous structure. Before the health effects of its fibres were fully understood, asbestos was considered a valuable building material as it had high strength and fire resistance. It was extensively used in schools for fire protection and insulation.

Asbestos can be found in a wide range of school buildings, including many constructed or refurbished before 1999 when its use was banned. More than 14,000 schools were built between 1945 and 1975 when the use of asbestos was at its height, and many others were refurbished. More than three quarters of schools have some buildings that contain asbestos. For further information on the different types of asbestos and where they might be found in school buildings, please see **Annex A**.

Asbestos fibres only become a risk to human health when they are released into the air and breathed in. For information on diseases related to asbestos exposure, please see **Annex B**.

The types of maintenance, repair work and improvements that might disturb asbestos include:

- installation of new ICT equipment and cables
- window replacements
- alterations to classroom structure and installing display equipment
- refurbishment projects

Asbestos fibres can also be released through vandalism, accidental damage, or age-related deterioration.

7. Activities that can accidentally disturb asbestos

If you are responsible for school buildings that might contain asbestos, you need to identify where it is, what type it is and its condition. You need to assess the risks and take action to manage and control those risks.

If this is not done, asbestos-containing materials could be disturbed or damaged and fibres released into the air. Precautions must be taken to ensure that tradespeople do not put themselves or others at risk by disturbing asbestos.

Examples of activities that have disturbed asbestos in schools and caused accidental exposure include:

- A caretaker who regularly swept the school boiler room, unaware that the dust was contaminated with asbestos.
- Teachers who stored materials in a cupboard lined with asbestos-containing materials, which became damaged over time, increasing the risk of exposure to fibres. The damage was not reported and was only discovered some time later when a survey was carried out.
- A contractor drilled through a ceiling into asbestos insulation boards. The contractor was unaware of the presence of asbestos as he had been shown straight to the work area without reference to the asbestos register.
- A group of pupils playing football inside damaged the ceiling with the ball, releasing asbestos dust from the roof void.
- Demonstrating the use of World War II (WWII) gas masks which contain asbestos within the filter material. If a gas mask has been kept in good condition and has not deteriorated, then asbestos fibres are unlikely to be released. However, these gas masks are old, and if the canister is damaged there is an increased risk that asbestos fibres will be released from the mask and into any storage bags or boxes. Whilst

the overall risk is low, HSE does not think it appropriate for children or teachers to wear or handle WWII gas masks that may potentially contain asbestos. Selling or supplying gas masks that contain asbestos is a breach of the Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemicals Regulations 2006, as amended.

8. Asbestos records and plans

Before arranging any work on the school premises, dutyholders will need to refer to documented information on asbestos that should already be available. These records include a survey, a register and a management plan. For flowcharts providing an overview of the duty to manage asbestos please see **Annex C**.

Systems should be tested and periodically reviewed to ensure that they work effectively; relevant documents need active management to make sure that they are kept up to date.

9. Asbestos survey

An asbestos survey conducted by a qualified asbestos surveyor is an effective way to help you manage asbestos in your premises. The survey should look in all accessible places, including above the ceilings and in floor ducting. A proper survey provides accurate information about the extent, type, location and condition of asbestos so that risks can be assessed and priorities identified. It is recommended that you arrange a survey if you suspect there are asbestos-containing materials in your premises.

There are two types of survey:

- Management surveys are undertaken to help manage asbestos-containing materials during the normal occupation and use of premises.
- Refurbishment surveys are required where the premises, or part of them, need upgrading, refurbishing or demolishing; or when any work is carried out that might disturb hidden asbestos that had not been previously identified.

The use of accredited or certificated surveyors is recommended.

10. Asbestos register

The asbestos register is a document derived from the asbestos survey. It records where asbestos is located or where there might be asbestos. It is, however, in a shorter more accessible format than the asbestos survey. If an area has not been accessed during a survey, it has to be assumed that asbestos is present unless there is strong evidence that there is not.

11. Asbestos management plan

The management plan contains current information about the presence and condition of any asbestos in the building. It should identify and include:

- who is responsible for managing asbestos
- the asbestos register
- the schedule for monitoring the condition of materials
- how decisions are communicated

The plan should be written specifically for your school and set out in detail how the risks from asbestos-containing materials will be managed.

12. Asbestos training

Under the Regulations information, instruction and training is required for anyone whose work could foreseeably expose them to asbestos, and those who supervise them.

This includes staff and maintenance people who may become exposed to asbestos while carrying out their normal everyday work. This includes activities such as entering boiler rooms and plant rooms where asbestos is present; changing light fittings in asbestos-tiled ceilings; persons that may come into contact with or damage asbestos materials within the building fabric.

Any training needs to be appropriate for the work and the roles undertaken by individuals.

- Asbestos awareness training is for people who are liable to disturb asbestos while carrying out their normal everyday work, and for those who manage them. This will include caretakers and maintenance staff, and could include building managers, bursars and heads. Taking an asbestos awareness training course does not mean that an individual can work on asbestos materials.
- Workers who intend to remove or carry out work with non-licensed materials such as asbestos cement, asbestos gaskets, and asbestos floor tiles, must have additional training in the type of work being undertaken.
- Higher risk materials including asbestos insulation, asbestos coatings and asbestos insulation board must only be repaired or removed by HSE licensed contractors.

Most members of school staff will not be directly involved with building management, repair or maintenance work. It is still important, however, that they are made aware of the potential hazards. All staff should be instructed not to disturb or damage asbestos-containing materials, for example, by allowing work to be pinned to walls. They should also report damage to school

fixtures or fittings that could lead to the release of asbestos fibres. This could include damage to ceiling or floor tiles, or column seals in system-built schools.

13. Consequences of not complying with asbestos regulations

Failure to comply with the Regulations is a criminal offence. The HSE investigates incidents where dutyholders fail to manage the risks and takes enforcement action where appropriate.

The case studies at **Annex C** outline some of the consequences that have ensued when dutyholders either failed to seek competent advice or ignored advice in the procurement of minor works, which has led to risk of exposure to asbestos.

14. Asbestos – what to do if things go wrong

If something goes wrong and you find you have been exposed to asbestos fibres, or you damage asbestos-containing materials you should:

- stop work immediately
- get advice from an asbestos expert about decontamination of people and premises, and take necessary remedial action
- ensure that staff and pupils are not able to access the area and do not remove any personal possessions, and
- notify the HSE, unless the incident is very minor – please see [FAQ](#) - When does inadvertent exposure to asbestos constitute a reportable incident under RIDDOR?

People who have been exposed to asbestos are understandably anxious about the possible effects on their health. A slight exposure is unlikely to cause asbestos related disease, but the risks are greater for prolonged or high levels of exposure.

Although the type of asbestos involved and duration of exposure may be known, there may be little reliable information about the level of exposure. If staff, pupils, or their parents are concerned about exposure, they should be advised to consult their General Practitioner (GP).

At the consultation, they should ask for a note to be made in their medical record, including dates, duration, type of asbestos and likely exposure levels if known. HSE does not recommend an X-ray, as this cannot indicate whether or not asbestos fibres have been inhaled.

A video of an asbestos victim's story can be found on the HSE website via the 'Guidance' tab. A link to the website follows:

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/asbestos/index.htm>

15. Asbestos – importance of collaboration

Day-to-day operational lead for health and safety is normally delegated to the senior management team, which has a key role in making sure risks are managed effectively within their school; particularly when any work is undertaken that may damage or disturb asbestos.

Good communication between the management team and staff is critical to effective risk management, whether the work involves identification and reporting damage, minor building repairs, or major refurbishment.

When any work is carried out on school buildings, collaboration between the school and contractors is vital. Particular attention must be given to ensure that contractors are aware of known and presumed locations of asbestos. It is essential that effective lines of communication are maintained between the school and those responsible for the contractors throughout the work.

A Health and Safety Executive video about the consequences of asbestos exposure is available to view on the HSE website via the 'Guidance' tab. A link to the website follows:

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/asbestos/index.htm>

16. Asbestos management – resources

The purpose of this guidance is to provide an overview of how asbestos should be managed. In all cases detailed guidance and advice should be sought from either your local authority or the HSE.

The HSE has developed a [checklist](#) and [FAQs](#) to help schools review their asbestos management arrangements.

If there is an incident resulting in asbestos exposure, HSE advice is available on the HSE website via the 'Guidance' tab. A link to the website follows:

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/asbestos/index.htm>

For community schools, further support and guidance is available from your local authority.

17. Useful organisations

Health and Safety Executive (HSE)

National Association of Headteachers (NAHT)

[Association of School and College Leavers \(ASCL\) Cymru](#)

[Association of Teachers and Lectures \(ATL\) Cymru](#)

[National Union of Teachers \(NUT\)](#)

[NASUWT](#)

[UNISON Wales](#)

[UCAC](#)

[GMB](#)

[Unite the Union](#)

[Voice the Union](#)

Joint Union Asbestos Committee (JUAC)

Trades Union Congress (TUC)

United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS)

UK Asbestos Training Association (UKATA)

Asbestos Testing and Consultancy Association (ATAC)

Independent Asbestos Training Providers (IATP)

NATAS Training Limited (NATAS)

Annex A: Types of asbestos and where they might be found

Products installed prior to 1999 that contain asbestos range from mastics, fillers and decorating products through to wallboards and ceiling tiles.

Three forms were commonly used. They were: blue (crocidolite), brown (amosite) and white (chrysotile) asbestos.

It is not possible to distinguish between them by eye, and they can occur together. Although white asbestos is less harmful than blue or brown, all are carcinogenic.

Where asbestos is found in school buildings

Asbestos fibres are released more easily from softer materials. The following asbestos-containing materials are commonly found in school buildings.

Thermal insulation

Asbestos insulation products may be found in boilers and hot water and heating pipe work. This might include: asbestos insulation for boilers and pipework in boiler-rooms, underground ducts and service risers within buildings.



Loose asbestos materials

This may be seen in mattresses and quilts around boilers and as thermal and acoustic insulation in roof spaces and floor voids. It has also been used as thermal insulation in kilns, electric storage heaters and cooking ranges. Loose fill is made up of pure asbestos and if disturbed can release large amounts of fibres into the air.

Sprayed coatings

Used mainly for fire protection and insulation, they consist of a high percentage of asbestos usually mixed with a cement binder applied to beams, columns, ceilings and the underside of floors. They are typically used to provide fire protection to steelwork and concrete structures in more industrial type buildings and in steel frame buildings. Asbestos fibres can be easily released from sprayed coatings.



Asbestos insulating board

Wall paneling and partitions may be made of asbestos insulating board cement or a material with an asbestos paper lining. Asbestos insulating board was extensively used in the construction of schools due to its low cost and ease of use. Asbestos insulating board looks similar to plasterboard and can crumble easily if damaged.

Asbestos insulating board packing can be found around steel columns and beams for fire protection of steel framed buildings (i.e. system-built premises such as CLASP and SCOLA). Ceiling tiles can also be made from asbestos insulating board.

Asbestos insulating board was often used for heat resistant surfaces in laboratories, kitchens and fire escape corridors. Warm air cabinet heaters and fume cupboards were typically lined with it and window and door surrounds are often made from asbestos insulating board.

Fire resistant boards behind electrical distribution boards are often made of asbestos insulating board. Fuse holders of this era often contain fibrous or woven asbestos. Flash guards within switchboards are often asbestos composites.



Paper and felt

Asbestos paper can be found as a facing layer under non-asbestos thermal insulation on pipework and was included as a facing on roofing felt.

Woven asbestos products

These include textiles, ropes and yarns. The most common applications found in schools are asbestos fabric cavity fire barriers in ceiling voids and gaskets on boilers and pipework. If frayed or damaged, asbestos fibres can be easily released.

Cement products

Many educational buildings contain asbestos cement in roofing sheets, boiler flues, external window panels and in many other places. Asbestos cement wall and roofing sheets are also common on garages, storage sheds and ancillary buildings. Gutters, soffits and shelves can also be made of asbestos cement.



Reinforced plastics

PVC floor tiles and resin composites, such as bakelite, can contain asbestos. These are typically found in old toilet cisterns and toilet seats; window sills and stair nosings; partitioning; electrical switchboards, socket outlets and electrical fittings. If materials are broken or worn they can release asbestos fibres.



Bitumen, resins and mastics

Bitumen mastics and adhesives were used for floor tiles and wall coverings, adhesives in floors and roofs, roofing felts, damp proof courses and bedding for sinks. Textured coatings such as Artex are found as decorative finishes to corridor walls and ceilings.



Annex B: Diseases related to asbestos exposure

Asbestos-related diseases (mainly lung cancer and mesothelioma) are the most common cause of death from occupational disease in the UK.

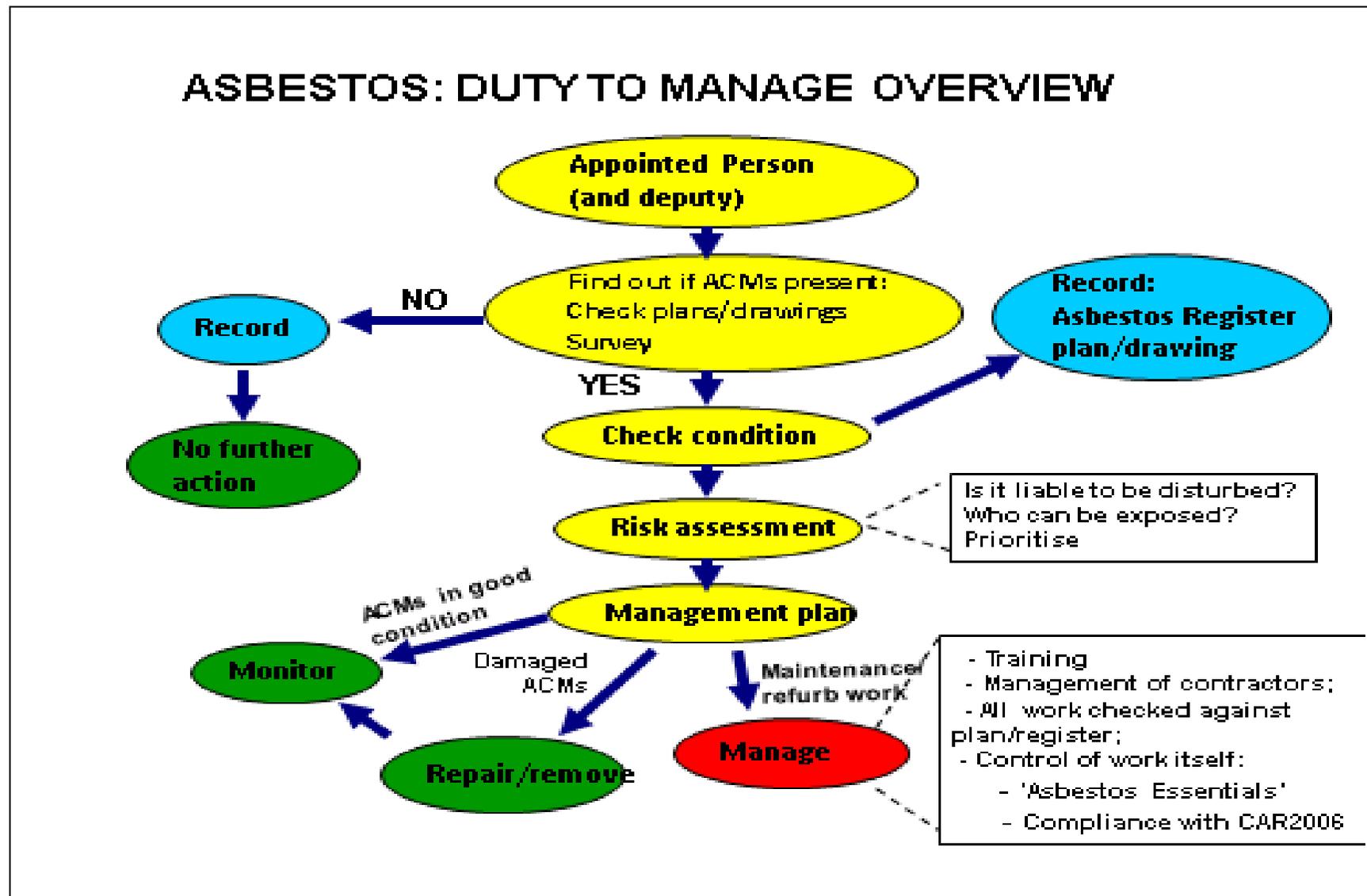
When asbestos-containing materials are disturbed or damaged, fibres can be released into the air. Breathing in asbestos fibres can lead to a number of dangerous diseases, although a slight exposure is unlikely to cause disease. People who are exposed to asbestos can develop the diseases years later. This is known as the latency period, where the symptoms of the disease are seen a long time after the initial exposure.

Most deaths now are the legacy of the widespread exposure to asbestos before its use was finally banned. Those most at risk today are people who regularly disturb asbestos, like tradespeople. Working on or near damaged asbestos-containing materials, or breathing in high levels of asbestos fibres can increase the chance of getting an asbestos-related disease. However, there is no threshold exposure below which there is no risk and all exposures are cumulative.

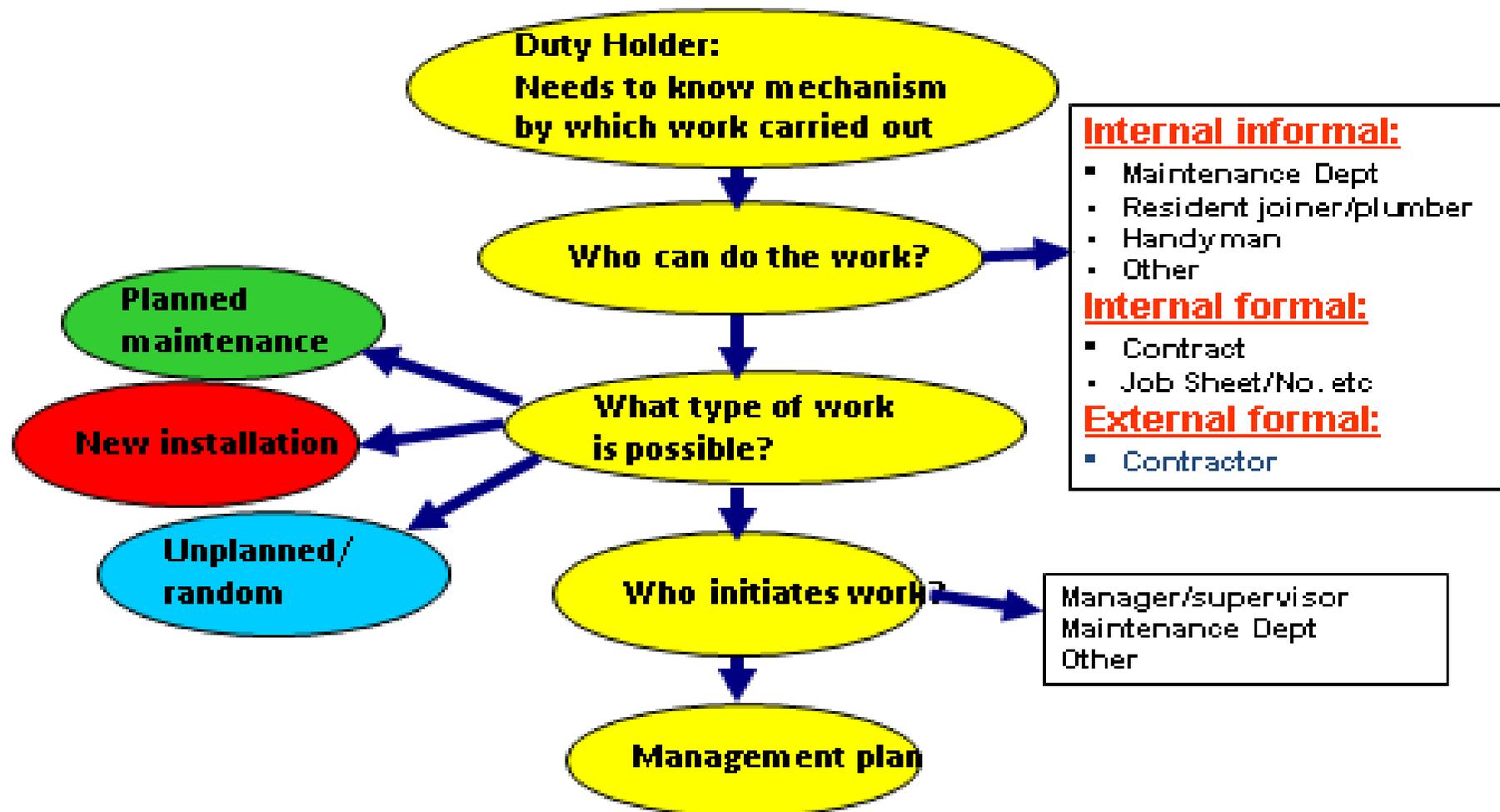
There are three potentially fatal asbestos-related diseases. It can take less than 15 years to more than 60 years from first exposure for symptoms to develop.

- Mesothelioma is a cancer of the cells which make up the membrane that covers the outer surface of most organs. It usually starts in the lining of the lungs.
- Lung cancer usually requires a greater exposure than mesothelioma. If asbestos exposure has occurred then the risk of developing lung cancer is greatly increased if a person smokes.
- Asbestosis leads to a scarring of the lung tissue and is a disease that usually progresses slowly. Asbestosis requires a large exposure to asbestos and is rare in people who have worked in schools. People with asbestosis have an increased risk of developing lung cancer and mesothelioma.

Annex C: Flowcharts providing an overview of the duty to manage asbestos



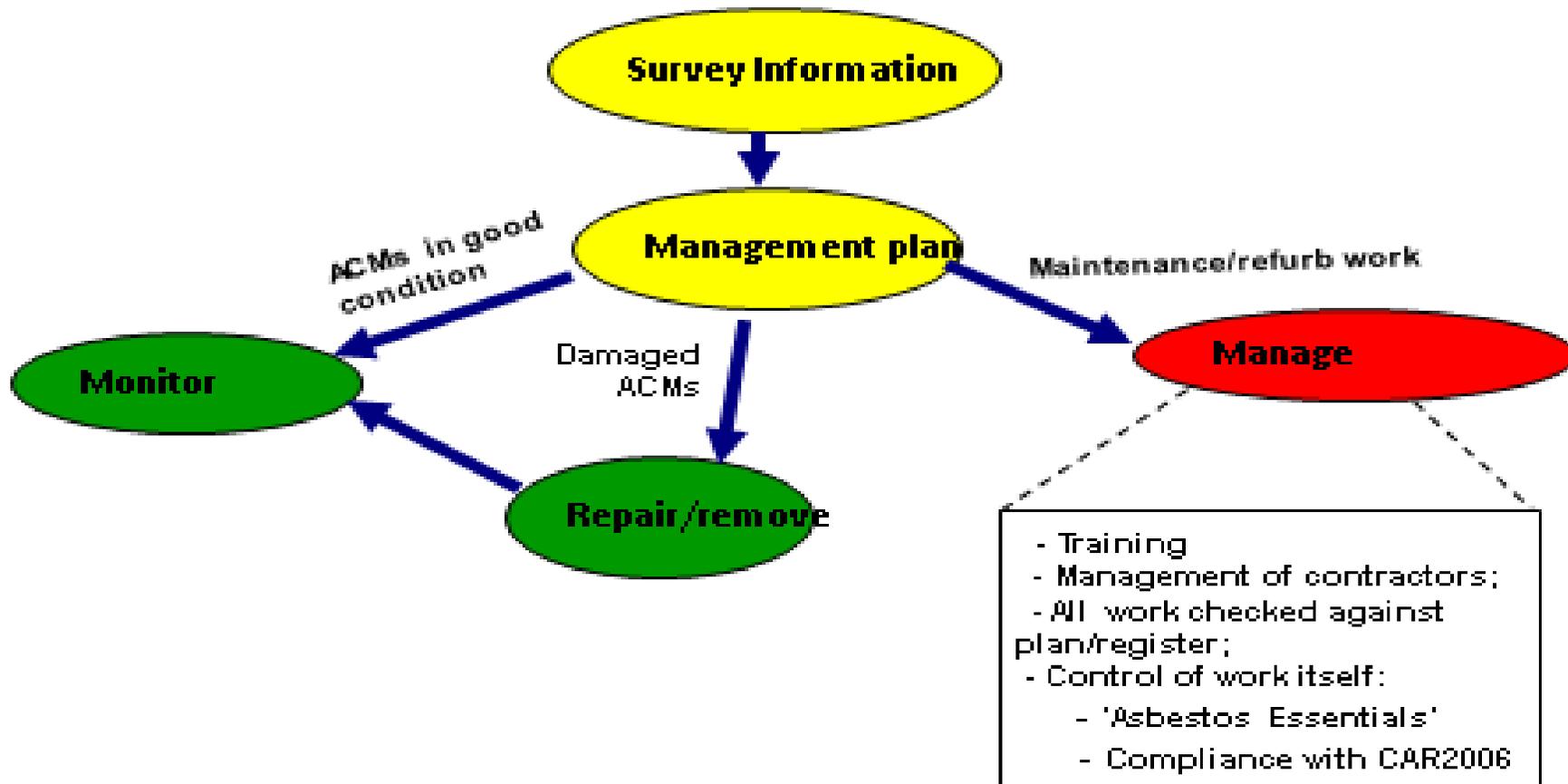
ASBESTOS: MANAGING MAINTENANCE/REFURB WORK



Where does Survey fit into Managing Asbestos?

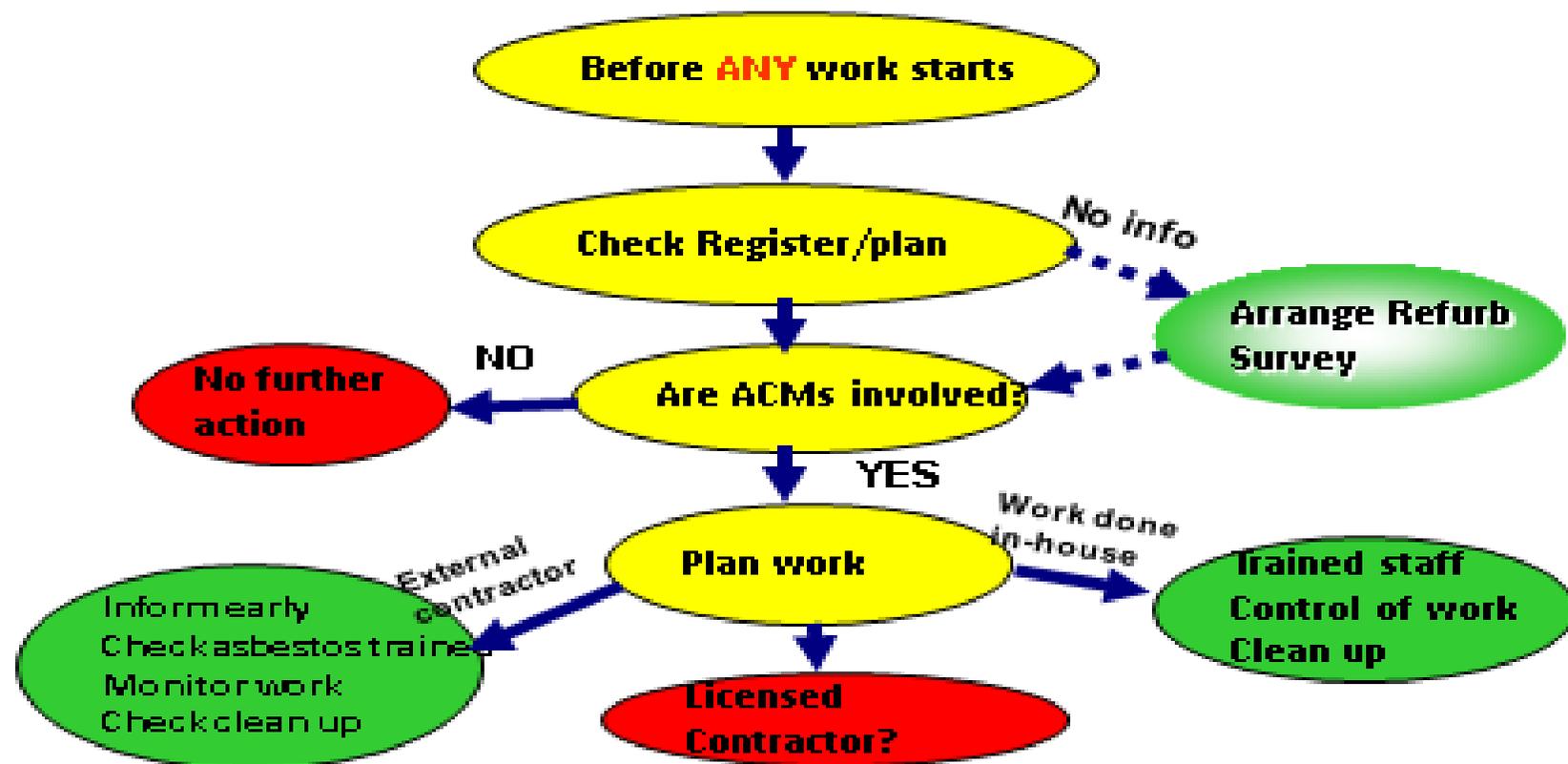


PREPARING THE ASBESTOS MANAGEMENT PLAN

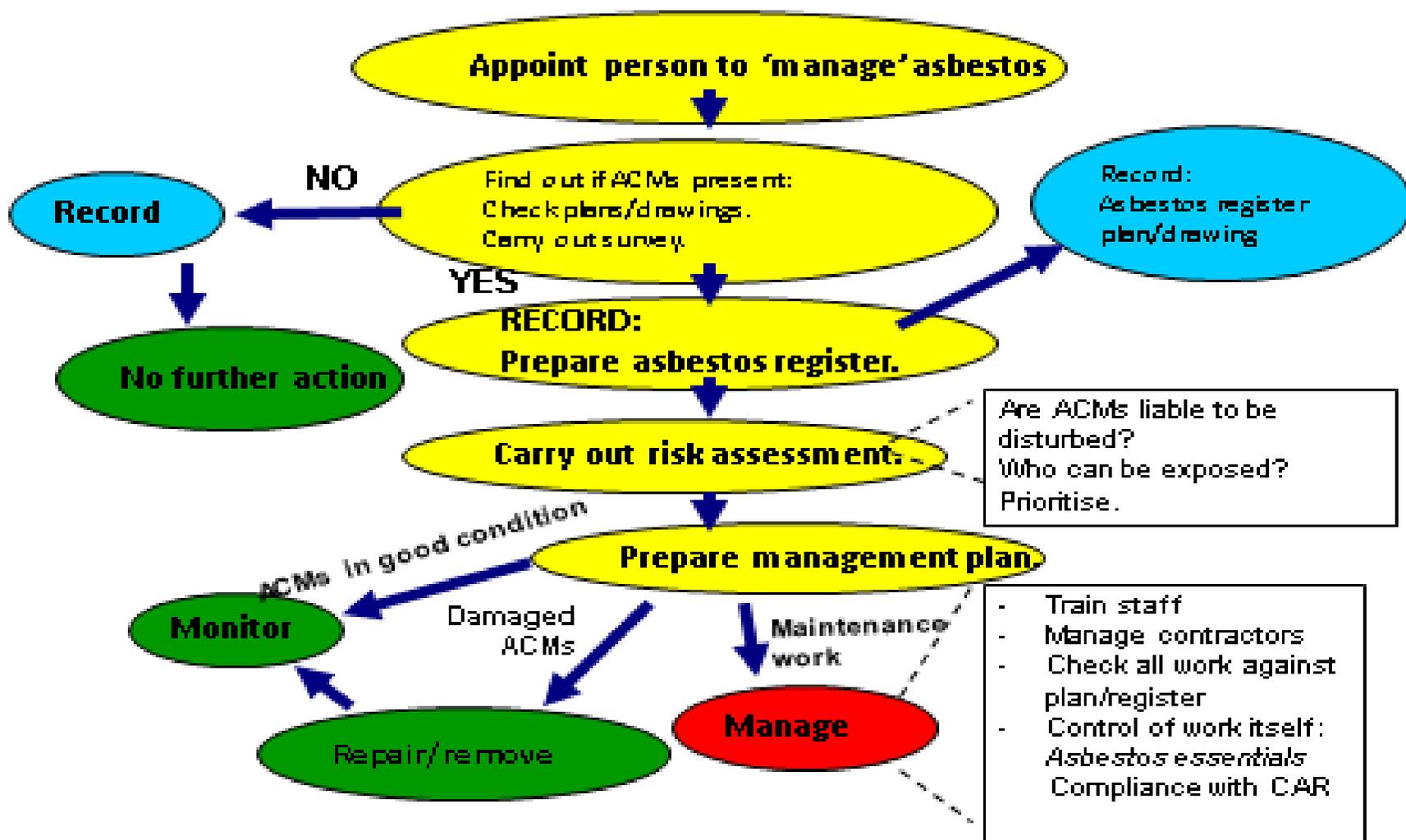


Management Plan: Dealing with Maintenance and Refurbishment Work

(Identify ACMs to be removed**/not disturbed)



DUTY TO MANAGE OVERVIEW



Process to remove asbestos

1	Establish the reasons to remove.	Part of a refurbishment project. Damage and/or deteriorated ACMs.
2	Establish a competent project team.	Leak testing throughout the works. Four-stage clearance upon completion.
3	Scope and commission an asbestos survey.	What areas are affected by the works? What works are required in these areas?
4	Project team to assess the survey and consider the asbestos removal strategy.	What ACMs need to be removed to permit the work to progress? What ACMs are also in the area that could also be removed?
5	LARC to notify the works to the enforcing authority.	
6	Monitor the asbestos works.	This may require an asbestos consultant and/ or asbestos analyst to be on site (see paragraphs 9.35 to 9.47).
7	Update the asbestos register.	Accurate records should be kept of the asbestos work so that the register can be accurately updated.
8	Non-asbestos works can now take place in an area free or largely free of ACMs.	This is further discussed in Section 8.

Annex D: Case studies

Inadequate asbestos survey led to contamination during refurbishment work

Asbestos surveys need to be accurate, thorough and comprehensive so that asbestos in buildings can be properly managed. Exposure to asbestos can only be prevented if the locations and types of asbestos-containing materials are identified and this information is passed on to workers who may disturb them.

During refurbishment work at a school, contractors demolished a partition wall in the belief that it did not contain asbestos. The partition wall was subsequently identified as containing Asbestos Insulating Board (AIB). The AIB had not been identified as part of the asbestos survey of the school. The demolition work led to the spread of asbestos in the school's computer server room and adjacent areas and subsequent decontamination costs were incurred by the dutyholder totaling £119,000. The contamination also led to a disruption to pupils in the run up to their exams and contractors involved in the refurbishment work were exposed to an unnecessary risk to their health.

The HSE investigation identified that the survey was inadequate in that the surveying company had failed to identify the presence of all of the asbestos-containing materials in the school (and in a number of other schools surveyed by the same company). The company was prosecuted and fined a total of £18,000 and ordered to pay costs of £21,000.

Unsafe removal led to exposure, prosecution and fines

The unsafe removal of asbestos insulation boards at a large independent school led to several people being exposed to asbestos fibres.

HSE prosecuted the school and the director of the company responsible for the refurbishment project, after an investigation found they had failed to identify and prevent the risk of asbestos exposure.

The HSE investigation found that over an 18-month period, from the initial design stages through to the construction work, there was inadequate planning and a failure to carry out a full asbestos survey. This was despite the fact that a sample taken from the building had identified the presence of asbestos.

The school was fined £60,000 and ordered to pay £13,000 in costs. The director was fined £10,000 with costs of £6,000.

Negligence and civil law

Under the common law, organisations have a duty of care to others who may be affected by their activities. Individuals have sued for damages using the civil law when they were injured as a result of another person's negligence.

A local authority was required to pay £250,000 to a victim's family for negligence in asbestos management many years previously, when the victim was a pupil at a local authority school.

Costs of decontamination

The financial consequences of having to carry out decontamination can be extreme, and there can be a negative impact on pupils' education.

In one school, a lab technician installed an IT cable through a ceiling void, putting holes through fire barriers and walls, and contaminating the majority of ceiling voids throughout the building. It was nine months before the exposure was spotted by a surveyor. The clean-up required new ceilings and lighting to be installed, and cost £280,000.

Another school arranged an electrical re-wiring over the summer. On observing the contractors with unsealed bags of asbestos waste, the school's site manager contacted an experienced asbestos consultant. Asbestos contamination had spread throughout the school, affecting everything from computers to test tubes, files and records and pupils' coursework.

At the start of the autumn term, 1,000 pupils had to be found temporary accommodation; the school did not reopen until the following summer term. The school and council incurred costs of £4.54 million as a direct result of the contamination. The HSE prosecuted the contractor.

A video of asbestos victim Christopher Morgan talking about how he contracted mesothelioma is available to watch on the HSE website via the 'Guidance' tab. A link to the website follows:

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/asbestos/index.htm>