

Asbestos Victims Support Groups' Forum UK

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Press Release.Embargo 30 June 12.00pm

Action Mesothelioma Day 1st July "Asbestos Protection Crisis Warning"

On Action Mesothelioma Day, Friday 1st July, hundreds of mesothelioma sufferers and their families will gather in cities throughout the UK to warn of an **asbestos protection crisis**.

They will say the crisis is a result of Government policy which:

- Has halted the HSE asbestos 'Hidden Killer' campaign
- Has cut HSE preventive work by 35%
- Intends to allow tenants to undertake their own repairs
- Fails to apply asbestos safeguards to tenants in social housing
- Has failed to carry out an audit of the extent, type and condition of the asbestos in schools.
- Has cancelled proactive health and safety inspections in state schools.

They will say that Government policy means that people will continue to die from mesothelioma particularly from low levels of exposure to asbestos **in social housing and in schools**.

John Shiers who suffers from mesothelioma and who led a campaign in the early 1980s about the dangers of asbestos in the Hulme flats in Manchester where he lived says: *"I was only ever exposed to asbestos living in the Hulme flats in Manchester which were riddled with asbestos. We had to campaign to get information about asbestos and for the dangers of asbestos to be taken seriously. Thirty years later, tenants are still not told where asbestos is in their homes despite the dangers of disturbing asbestos. This must change."*

Carole Hagedon *"I was diagnosed with mesothelioma after a 35 year career in teaching. Needless to say, I had not imagined teaching to have such deadly potential. It is shameful that some schools are still failing to protect the children and staff in them. We must campaign for proper controls"*.

Tony Whitston, Chair of the Forum, says: *"Low level exposures to asbestos can cause mesothelioma. Government policy is putting maintenance workers, tenants and school staff and children at risk. It is unforgivable for Government to repeat*

the policy mistakes of the past which have caused so many deaths. The Hidden Killer campaign should be reinstated and action taken urgently to protect tenants, school staff and children.”

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NOTES FOR EDITORS

Mesothelioma is a fatal tumour found principally in the lung pleura for which the only known cause is exposure to asbestos and life expectancy is about 12 months from diagnosis. Uniquely, among asbestos-related diseases mesothelioma can be caused by low exposure to asbestos.

Mesothelioma Incidence:

The 2008 latest figures for mesothelioma diagnoses is 2,400 and in 2008 there were 2,249 deaths. Mesothelioma is one of the top 20 fatal cancers. The female death rate for mesothelioma is rising exponentially and is more than three times higher in the UK than in the US.

HSE:

The HSE launched a campaign, “*The Hidden Killer*”, to warn trades people, especially maintenance workers, of the dangers of low exposures to asbestos in buildings which contain asbestos. That campaign has been halted due to budget cuts. The HSE budget has been cut by 35%. Campaigners are calling for the reinstatement of the campaign and cancellation of the cuts.

Domestic Premises:

Asbestos is estimated to be present in 90% of all public sector housing. (As *Safe as Houses*. A Report for UCATT. Dr. Linda Waldman and Heather Williams June 2009)

The Control of Asbestos regulations 2006 (CAR 2006) do not apply to domestic properties. The construction trade union, UCATT and the Forum are calling for CAR 2006 to apply to domestic premises.

Most Social Housing Landlords do not inform tenants of where asbestos is located in their premises. Campaigners are calling on social housing landlords to provide a register of asbestos found in social housing.

Schools:

228 school teachers in the UK have died from mesothelioma since 1980 with 140 dying in the last 10 years. Other school support staff, like caretakers and cleaners, have also died from the disease. There are 20-30 children to each teacher but because of the long latency it is not known how many have subsequently died.

The asbestos in our schools is old and much of it is deteriorating.

Campaigners call for the Government to audit all schools containing asbestos and to adopt a policy of phased removal, prioritising the most dangerous asbestos materials first.

Campaigners call for a policy of openness so that staff and parents are aware of the dangers of asbestos and best measures can be implemented to ensure the safety of the occupants of schools.