

# Asbestos Victims Support Groups' Forum UK

## Principles of Good Practice for Asbestos Victims Advice Groups

### Background

Effective asbestos victims advice groups for people affected by asbestos related diseases are an absolute necessity if victims are to receive appropriate help, support and justice.

The Asbestos Victims Support Groups' Forum is concerned however, about the burgeoning of sources of 'asbestos help and support' that are little more than a front for those who are seeking to lure and then profit from asbestos victims.

In order to ensure the best possible service for asbestos victims, the Forum formulated the following principles and minimum standards of good practice to which all asbestos victims advice groups of the Forum must adhere.

### Principles of Good Practice

No Asbestos Victims Advice Group helpline or contact point will be staffed by a solicitor or someone working on behalf of a solicitor

An Asbestos Victims Advice Group will always:

- **Be properly constituted**

The Group will have in place, and operate according to, a Constitution or Set of Rules, which defines the group and clearly states the aims and rules of government.

The Group will have an independent management structure; have a method of public accountability such as an open Annual General Meeting for example; and will be a registered charity, or seeking to register as a charity, or clearly able to demonstrate how it can be defined as a not-for-profit organisation.

- **Provide free, independent services to victims.**

All information, advice, help, assistance and support provided by the Group will be independent and will always be free of charge.

- **Provide a comprehensive advice and information service to victims**

The Group will provide a holistic service to victims including, for example, comprehensive advice on industrial injury and other welfare benefits, Government compensation schemes, procedures in respect of pursuing a civil claim for personal injury damages, assistance with appeals where possible.

The Group will provide home visits for anyone affected by asbestos related diseases residing in the stated catchment area of the Group.

It is not appropriate to signpost or refer asbestos victims to Solicitor firms for such advice.

- **Offer ongoing support**

The Group will seek to provide continuing support for however long is necessary and will have a confidential file on each victim for this purpose, which is kept in accordance with data protection requirements.

- **Provide a telephone help line**

The Group will also have in place a system by which all telephone messages are dealt with promptly by the Group. The telephone contact number for the group and any messaging system will not be supplanted or replaced with a system where the telephone help line number is directed elsewhere, such as to a solicitor firm, for instance.

- **Provide a website**

The Group will also have a website of information for asbestos victims including an 'about us' page, which is regularly maintained and updated. If the Group has social media accounts, these will be regularly managed and maintained by the Group.

- **Provide a list of solicitor firms experienced in asbestos litigation**

An important service that an asbestos support group provides is having local information available about personal injury solicitor firms. The Group will be able to provide a list of several solicitor firms (minimum three firms) that are experienced in asbestos litigation that operate to minimum standards of good practice in respect of asbestos victims.

- **Have a robust means of demonstrating solicitors' competence**

It is essential for advice groups to be able to show that they have taken all necessary steps to ensure that solicitors are competent through questionnaires, interviews and other such measures.

- **Keep proper accounts**

All Groups will keep proper accounts that are subject to annual independent scrutiny.

Where a solicitor or solicitor firm makes a donation to the Group this will, be in accordance with the Law Society's conduct provisions for disclosure of funding, fee sharing and referral arrangements. This will be clearly indicated to victims and the donation amount specified.

- **Have a complaints procedure**

The Group will have in place a clearly evident complaints procedure that is independent of the person or persons who may be the subject of the complaint.