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TUC backs call for asbestos removal and national register in new report

The TUC has backed proposals in a new report published today (Friday) by Asbestos Information CIC to create a national database to map asbestos presence in buildings.

These proposals would create a regime where asbestos could be more safely managed, and ultimately removed, from all buildings.

The current legal framework allows for asbestos in buildings to be managed in situ, rather than removed. But this approach is now widely recognised as insufficient, as the number of people diagnosed with the fatal cancers it causes remains at an all-time high.

The TUC is also calling for a new legal duty to safely remove asbestos, with a clear timetable for 40-years for its removal from all public buildings.

Rt Hon Sir Stephen Timms, the Work and Pensions minister with responsibility for health and safety, wrote last year: "Removing asbestos from schools and hospitals over a 10-year period would, over 50 years, benefit the UK economy to the tune of around £11.6 billion and benefit the Exchequer by around £3.6 billion."

TUC General Secretary **Paul Nowak** said:

“Everyone should be safe where they work. But asbestos is still present in hundreds of thousands of workplaces across Britain, including most schools and hospitals. Many workers aren't aware it’s there, and many aren’t aware of the very serious dangers.

“Britain has the highest rate of asbestos deaths in the world. It’s time to end this national scandal.

“The proposed mapping tool would help us know who is at risk from asbestos and would be an important step towards its removal from all public buildings.

"And it would enable us to identify buildings with asbestos which require environmental upgrades – ensuring the removal is done at the same time.

“The only way to protect today’s workers and future generations is through the safe removal of asbestos from every workplace.”

**ENDS**

**Notes to editors:**

- **Asbestos in Britain:** Britain banned the use of asbestos in 1999, but many buildings still contain it, including schools, hospitals, shops, and offices. According to the government’s own figures, 83% of schools contain asbestos, and 94% of hospital trusts.

Britain has the highest incidence rate of mesothelioma globally. Mesothelioma is a terminal cancer caused by exposure to asbestos. Sufferers die, on average, within 12 months of onset of symptoms.

- **Quote from Rt Hon Sir Stephen Timms MP:** The quote comes from the foreword to this report by Mesothelioma UK, which was contributed in his then capacity as chair of the Work and Pensions Committee: <https://www.mesothelioma.uk.com/downloads/clearing-the-air-the-costs-and-benefits-of-removing-asbestos-from-uk-schools-and-hospitals/?wpdmdl=20853>

- **About the TUC:** The Trades Union Congress (TUC) exists to make the working world a better place for everyone. We bring together the 5.5 million working people who make up our 48 member unions. We support unions to grow and thrive, and we stand up for everyone who works for a living.

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