

HSEQ Bulletin



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Safety advice notice: 57

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Asbestos failings lead to exposed workers

Brian Parker discusses asbestos safety checks and how fails in checks can lead to asbestos exposures to workers.

This HSEQ bulletin is focused around the successful prosecution of two construction companies who exposed their subcontractors to asbestos fibers during school refurbishment work. They were fined a total of £112,000 plus £57,000 costs between them.

Derby Crown Court heard that on August 1st 2016, Oakwood Junior School in Derby was undergoing refurbishment work; this work was being carried out during the school holidays.

Two subcontractors had been tasked with removing suspended ceiling tiles, they entered a storage room which had a suspended ceiling made from asbestos containing materials.

The subcontractors started to remove the tiles, unaware that they contained asbestos, potentially exposing themselves to harmful fibres.

A licensed asbestos removal company who happened to be working on site alerted management to the situation and action was taken to stop the work and deal with the contamination.

Investigation

An HSE investigation found that main contractor Ashe Construction Limited had failed to effectively plan, manage and monitor the work to prevent the accidental removal of the asbestos-containing tiles.

Ashe also failed to effectively communicate information about the asbestos, leaving the storage room open without barriers or signage, warning of asbestos. The work was not then suitably managed or monitored to ensure that nobody came into contact with the asbestos.

Investigation

The HSE also found that Cladceil Limited, a contractor appointed by Ashe to carry out the suspended ceiling removal work, also failed to effectively plan, manage and monitor the work.

The company had appointed a subcontractor to remove the suspended ceilings on its behalf but had only provided a generic risk assessment and method statement which failed to identify important information, including the potential asbestos risk.

Ashe Construction Limited of Hitchin, Herefordshire pleaded guilty to breaching CDM and safety regulations and was fined £100,000 and ordered to pay costs of £9,759.76.

Training

Despite asbestos being banned from construction use in 1999, asbestos can still be found in many homes, factories and business-premises across the UK. Asbestos is harmful and can be a direct threat to you and people around you if the fibres are disturbed. It is vital to know the laws in place and what your responsibility is if you come across or damage asbestos.

The current Regulations place a legal duty on all employers and companies to provide full information, instruction and training to all their employees who may be liable to come into contact with asbestos containing materials.

The three main types of information, instruction and training are:

- Asbestos awareness training**
- Training for non-licensable asbestos work
- Training for licensable asbestos work

Not only should all employees working with asbestos take initial asbestos training but it is also extremely important that they take refresher training every year. Taking refresher training will ensure you are up to date and can protect yourself and those around you.

*Source: <https://www.shponline.co.uk/>

**Asbestos awareness training is available with UTN Training; part of the AFI group of companies: https://www.utntraining.co.uk/courses/asbestos_awareness