

EDUCATION COMMITTEE
15TH DECEMBER 2000

ASBESTOS MATERIALS IN SCHOOL BUILDINGS

Purpose of Report

1. To respond to a Notice of Motion to County Council by Mr. P.G. Allnatt on the 21st November 2000 and referred for consideration and report by this Committee:

“Given the fact that some Local Education Authority school buildings still have “safe” asbestos material, Council requests that:

- (i) A report be brought on the cost to school budgets caused by the specialist maintenance requirements and its impact on utility, such as fixtures to walls etc, and*
- (ii) A second report be brought to demonstrate the feasibility of a programme of asbestos replacement on a best value basis”.*

Background

History

2. From the early 1900’s up to the mid 1970’s, asbestos in many forms was widely used in building construction and the majority of buildings of that age contain asbestos in some form or other. Wiltshire schools are no exception.

Risks

3. The existence of asbestos in a building does not, in itself, pose any threat to health and safety, as long as the material surface is covered, sealed or protected by appropriate means. In practice, painting the surface is usually the most appropriate and economic means of treatment. The danger to human health will only arise where free fibres can be inhaled. This will only occur from unprotected or damaged asbestos materials where the exposed surface could release fibres into the atmosphere.

Health and Safety Requirements

4. Over the years, the Health and Safety Executive has developed regulations and guidelines for the safe management of asbestos in buildings. These have been closely followed in all County Council properties.
5. Broadly speaking, these guidelines have required:
 - (a) Covering, sealing or encapsulating asbestos materials to prevent fibre release from the surface.

- (b) Removal of materials, under controlled conditions, only when they are unprotected or damaged and the above treatments are impractical or uneconomic.
- (c) Periodic monitoring to ensure that the means of protection is still effective.

The County Council Approach

- 6. Although there has not previously been any legal requirement, the County Council has adopted a policy of carrying out non-invasive surveys and producing registers for all its buildings, to identify the incidence and condition of all asbestos or suspected asbestos materials. This has served to inform County Council staff, premises managers and building contractors who might risk disturbing asbestos materials. It also provides a reference for the periodic monitoring.

New Legislation

- 7. New Asbestos Management Regulations, expected to be effective from May 2001, contain requirements for more precise surveys, recording, risk assessments and monitoring of the presence of asbestos than is the present practice of the County Council. The Environmental Services Department has this year commenced a three-year programme of re-surveys to meet the new requirements. The first batches of new registers and advice are being despatched to schools this month.
- 8. These surveys do not include destructive investigations and therefore cannot identify the presence of asbestos buried or concealed deep within the building structure.

Responsibilities for Dealing with Asbestos

Maintenance Works

- 9. Under the present LMS scheme, operative since April 1999, the delegation of funding and responsibilities currently are as shown below for maintenance works. For this purpose, maintenance works are defined as works which arise out of the need to either maintain asbestos materials or to disturb asbestos materials as a result of maintenance works to adjacent materials:-

Voluntary Aided Schools	-	All responsibility and funding for all asbestos related work is delegated but schools which participate in the VA Schools maintenance buy-back scheme hand back both responsibility and funding for Environmental Services Department to manage.
-------------------------	---	--

County, Controlled and Foundation	-	Responsibility and funding for asbestos removal or other major asbestos related
-----------------------------------	---	---

Schools

maintenance is retained by the Local Education Authority in all schools.

Responsibility and funding for encapsulation, decorations, air testing and health and safety issues are delegated to the schools.

Primary and Special Schools, which participate in the maintenance pooling scheme, hand back the funding for Environmental Services Department to manage in respect of these latter responsibilities.

10. Due to the fact that the new Regulations for 2001 will place responsibilities for asbestos management on employers, and that in VA and Foundation Schools the governors are the employers, adjustments will be made to the funding arrangements to bring them in line with the responsibilities under the new regulations.

Alteration and Improvement Works

11. Where alteration and improvement works encounter or need to disturb or remove asbestos materials, the funding of all additional costs resulting from the presence of asbestos falls to the same source as for the funding of the works.

Expenditure on Specialist Maintenance Work

Local Authority Managed Works

12. Clearly, due to the specialised nature of the works and the need to employ appropriately licensed contractors, the costs of working with asbestos are higher than for normal building works.
13. In a typical year, expenditure on asbestos related maintenance works, undertaken from the Central Maintenance budget and the two maintenance buy-back schemes, is of the order of £60,000. The annual total value of all maintenance work undertaken in schools from the above sources is £1.2 million.
14. These are indicative figures and include all the larger asbestos removal jobs which have become necessary. It is not possible to obtain figures from contracts where the cost of dealing with asbestos is only a minor part of a large project.

School Managed Maintenance Work

15. Schools are not required to report on their expenditure on building maintenance and it is not therefore possible to analyse their value of spend on asbestos related works. However, it can be seen from the limited areas of responsibility which rest with the schools (paragraph 9 above) that it is likely to be minimal.

Impact on the Use of Rooms

Fixtures to Walls

16. Where fixings involve drilling or screwing into wall panels containing asbestos, the operation will inevitably release asbestos fibres. Such work has to be carried out under controlled conditions and in almost all cases will necessitate the use of licensed asbestos contractors. Although it will result in increased costs due to the presence of asbestos, it is insignificant in comparison with the cost of stripping out the asbestos and replacing with other materials.

Pinning and Sticking Displays of Children's Work to Walls

17. Where the asbestos content of wall (or ceiling) linings is close to the surface, the affixing of drawing pins, staples, sticky tape etc., has the potential of damaging the surface seal and exposing the asbestos material. Where these situations exist, schools are advised not to adopt these practices of attaching materials to the walls and ceilings.
18. The Chief Education Officer advises that very occasionally, criticisms have been raised in Ofsted Reports where classroom walls could not be fully utilised for displays of work. Where this has occurred, it has been addressed by providing pin-board, fixed over the materials containing asbestos.

Asbestos Replacement Feasibility

Implications

19. Large scale asbestos removal projects are expensive and can be particularly disruptive to building users. In order to achieve the required controlled conditions for asbestos removal work, it is often necessary to take large sections of buildings and frequently whole buildings out of operation for extended periods of time. In schools, where this cannot be accommodated within holiday periods, it becomes necessary to have term-time closures or to import temporary classrooms, with all the associated disruption and further costs.

Costs

20. The likely costs of quantity surveyors fees alone for producing accurate estimates for the removal of the identified asbestos in all the schools in the County would be of the order of £40,000. The cost of the actual removal works along with all the protection, reinstatement etc would be expected to run into many millions of pounds. Beyond those materials identified from the non-invasive surveys, there are likely to be still more concealed, which cannot be reliably estimated.

Conclusions

21. Building condition surveys carried out over the last twelve months for asset management plans have highlighted a substantial backlog of building repairs and maintenance in County Council properties. The total for all works in all Wiltshire Schools recommended for the next five years is £47 million, which is significantly more than can be accommodated by the present funding levels on maintenance.
22. The asbestos situation in Wiltshire schools is effectively contained and managed in accordance with health and safety legislation and guidelines. It could not therefore be recommended that best value would be achieved by the adoption of a general policy of pro-active asbestos replacement.

Recommendation

22. That the report be noted.

RICHARD J. LANDER

Director of Environmental Services

The following unpublished documents have been relied on in the preparation of this Report:

None

Environmental Impact of the Recommendations contained in this Report:

None