

Condition of School Buildings

In December, it emerged that Government officials have escalated the risk level of school buildings collapsing to 'very likely', after a rise in reported 'serious structural issues' and the failure of schools to get extra capital from the Treasury.

The Department for Education's (DfE's) annual report states that school blocks collapsing is one of the six 'key risks' currently facing the DfE, according to its annual report, which also states: 'There is a risk of collapse of one or more blocks in some schools which are at or approaching the end of their designed life-expectancy and structural integrity is impaired.'

It appears that the risk is predominantly in those buildings built in the years 1945 to 1970 which used 'system-built' light-frame techniques. These are commonly known as CLASP or SCOLA schools.

Although this report refers to England only, given that the same building techniques were used across the UK, it is possible that issues exist in schools in all jurisdictions.

In response to the report, some employers have commissioned full surveys of their system-built schools to ascertain the condition of the buildings.

Actions for NASUWT Representatives/Local Secretaries:

For your school, and/or any employers you deal with, ensure that:

- they are aware of the report, and its implications;
- they have appropriate systems in place to ensure the condition of buildings is monitored and issues are addressed; and
- appropriate procedures are in place for staff to report building issues to management.

TUC Health and Safety Representatives Survey

The annual TUC Union Health and Safety Reps Survey for 2022/23 is now live and can be found at: <https://www.tuc.org.uk/news/we-want-hear-union-health-and-safety-reps>. The data the survey generates is invaluable for a variety of reasons, and all Health and Safety Representatives are urged to complete it.

Tree Management

Newcastle City Council has been fined £280,000 following the death of a pupil due to a falling tree.

The six-year-old pupil was playing with friends at her school when she was killed by a falling willow tree. Several other children were hit by the falling tree but managed to escape, some with superficial injuries.

The Health and Safety Executive's (HSE's) investigation found that the tree had decayed and was in a poor condition. Newcastle City Council had failed to identify the extent of the decay or to manage the risk posed by the tree.

This is clearly an extremely tragic event, but one that would not have occurred if sufficient and appropriate monitoring systems were in place.

continued overleaf

Actions for NASUWT Representatives/Local Secretaries:

For your school, and/or any employers you deal with, ensure that the school/employers have a programme of tree maintenance/inspection in place, which includes provisions to check trees after periods of high winds. Although schools/employers are only responsible in law for the trees on their premises, schools/employers should also have procedures in place to liaise with neighbouring land owners over trees which are adjacent to school premises.

Outdoor Play Equipment

Any schools with outdoor play equipment must ensure that any apparatus is regularly inspected and maintained in accordance with manufacturers' recommendations. Sadly, there have been cases where children have been injured by faulty play equipment.

In addition, in 2019, the HSE issued a warning about heavy stone/concrete outdoor furniture. The concerns relate to table and bench sets in which a solid timber table top is supported by a stone or concrete plinth at each end. The table top connection is concealed and secured with an adhesive resin-based fixative. The plinths may or may not be partially secured to the ground using a similar adhesive. The stability of the table is dependent upon the integrity and strength of the connection between the plinths and the table top, and therefore it needs to be installed correctly. In some instances, the connection was failing, leading to instability and the potential for the table to collapse.

Health and Safety Representatives/Local Secretaries should ensure that schools/employers have maintenance and inspection regimes in place for any outdoor equipment/tables.

Joint Union Heatwave Guidance

The NASUWT has worked with the other education unions to produce comprehensive guidance on heatwaves. Although the summer seems far away, it is important that schools begin planning for potential summer heatwaves now, particularly in regard of any adaptations to buildings that may be required to alleviate excessive temperatures. The guidance can be found [here](#) and representatives should bring it to the attention of school leaders/employers.



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