

Asbestos and Christmas decorations

As the festive season approaches, many schools will be putting up decorations. Whilst it should be noted that teachers cannot be required to put up any display materials, if any teachers or support staff wish to do so, they should note the following:

Any school built before the year 2000 can contain asbestos, and many teachers and support staff have been unwittingly exposed to asbestos through pinning items to walls and ceilings. A drawing pin pushed into an asbestos-containing material can release 6,000 fibres, whilst using a staple gun can release many times more.

Unless the school was built after 2000, it should be assumed that asbestos could be present, unless there is clear evidence to the contrary. Every school containing asbestos is legally required to have an asbestos register, detailing where asbestos can be found in the school. Members and health and safety representatives in schools built before 2000 should ask to see the school's asbestos register if they have any concerns about possible asbestos in the workplace, and before pinning anything to walls or ceilings. If there is asbestos present, this should be clearly labelled.

If the school built before 2000 does not have an asbestos register, and has no evidence of a survey confirming there is no asbestos present, this should be reported to the NASUWT without delay. Any unlabelled asbestos should be reported to the headteacher and rectified without delay. If there are any issues with labelling, then, again, this should be reported to the NASUWT.

HSE stress risk assessments

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has confirmed that work-related stress is a workplace hazard. As such, legislation requires that this must be risk assessed in exactly the same way as any other workplace hazard.

In exactly the same way that it would be unacceptable to risk assess a hazard such as working at height only after someone has fallen, it is unacceptable to only risk assess work-related stress after an employee becomes ill. Risk assessments must be completed and regularly updated and shared with the NASUWT.



HSE illness and injury statistics

The HSE has released the latest illness and injury statistics. These show the scale of the work-related stress problem, being responsible for 49% of days lost, more than any other cause, with education having rates substantially above the average for all occupations. The statistics underline the need for all employers to take the issue of work-related stress seriously, and to carry out risk assessments.

The full statistics can be found at:

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/overall/hssh1617.pdf>.



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