

GOSHA

GUERNSEY OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH ASSOCIATION
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Newsletter June 2006

Headlines

- CORGI standard is here – Guernsey's Gas Safety Ordinance came into force on 1 June. The Ordinance requires that anyone who carries out gas installation works is competent and achieves minimum standards.
- Asbestos – don't ignore it, don't disturb it (always use a licensed contractor), record it and know the standards all businesses must work to. If you are not sure, find out about it (see the article below).
- European Safety & Health Week – this year the focus is on protecting young people in the workplace – more information to follow.
- Noise and vibration, working at height and control of substances hazardous to health – what have you done to assess the risks in your workplace? Future meetings will look at these subjects
- Our next meeting will be on 20 July – a visit to Ronez's quarry – it promises to be a very interesting evening – look out for our invitation to attend.
- Smoking – are you ready for the ban which is to start next month?

Want to know more about any of these topics? Want us to cover or address any topic? Then contact the GOSHA committee

Meeting 18 May Asbestos

Angus McLellan of Normandie Health & Safety gave an excellent presentation on this most important subject and we thought you'd find the following summary from him both helpful and thought provoking. Every employer, building owner, occupier and manager has legal responsibilities to protect others from harm.

Thirty years ago the asbestos industry, government and medical specialists in the UK all believed that in incidence of death from occupational exposure to airborne asbestos fibre would peak by the turn of the century (year 2000). This belief was based on the premise that the demography of the exposed population dating from the "bad old days" and the latent period before onset of disease would coincide during the ten years between 1990-2000.

Unfortunately this has not proved to be the case and asbestos deaths particularly due to mesothelioma have continued to rise. Further research into the problem has indicated that this continued high incidence of illness is probably due to exposure of secondary trades e.g. carpenters, plumbers, insulation workers etc who become intimately involved with asbestos materials incorporated into buildings and structures between 1920 – 1990. (In UK asbestos prohibition regulations came into force in 1985 and asbestos licensing regulation in 1983. Prohibition regulations were not adopted in the Channel Islands as a result of which large quantities of asbestos containing building materials ended up in the islands and continued to be used up until the 90's).

In response to the continued asbestos problems HSE in the UK introduced the new 'Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations 2002' the main provisions of which came into force in May 2004. Jersey HSE have recently introduced a code of practice embodying the same principles as the UK requirements and have also implemented 'licensing' requirements some years ago. Guernsey has not introduced any specific asbestos legislation but relies on 'best practice', which if contested at law would fall back to UK standards.

The ground breaking change incorporated within the new Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations are requirements relating to 'buildings' rather than processes.

Under the new legislation a duty is placed on persons in Control of Premises to manage the risk from Asbestos. This effectively requires these duty holders to "find it & manage it". Unfortunately it is not quite as simple as that phrase might suggest:

The duty holder must do one of 3 things:

1. Assume Asbestos is present in a building or item of equipment and manage it accordingly. This option does have huge disadvantages as you would have to survey again every time you wanted to do something to determine whether it was asbestos or not.
2. Survey for Asbestos: Samples are taken by the surveyor to confirm and identify the presence of Asbestos and then manage items which are positively identified.
3. Have a very good reason for knowing there is no asbestos in your building e.g. A new build post 2000 with an architectural sign off.

Most duty holders are choosing for the survey option known as a Type 2 sampling and assessment survey. Once the survey has been conducted and Asbestos materials identified it is then necessary to conduct an assessment of risk posed by those materials. The first assessment will be what is called the Material Assessment Algorithm. This assesses the propensity for those materials to release fibre.

The second assessment is the Priority Assessment Algorithm or the Human Exposure potential. The survey will need to consider who could be exposed and for how long, the quantity of the material and whether maintenance would disturb the asbestos. The risk assessment scores are added up and the surveyor details an appropriate management action.

Once the survey has been completed the information gleaned should be detailed in an Asbestos Register.

The register should have several component parts:

1. Your Asbestos policy detailing what, how, why, when & where
2. The register of Asbestos inclusions with the risk assessment scores and recommendations
3. Staff training notes
4. Contractors notes, where necessary, and;
5. Sections capable of receiving further information such as air quality certificates or contractors method statements, as well as a section for the survey report itself.

An Asbestos register is a live document and as such must be kept up to date. To keep this up to date it is necessary to monitor the condition of the Asbestos and review the register as risks could have changed i.e. an old unused store room with Asbestos has been changed into an office or an Asbestos ceiling has suffered from water damage.

The Health and Safety Executive is quite clear that Asbestos removal should be looked at as the last option. If it is in good condition, not releasing fibres and not putting persons at risk then leave it in situ as it is still doing the job it was designed to do.

It may be possible to encapsulate or isolate the Asbestos prior materials but only a trained eye would tell.

If there is a requirement for the removal of Asbestos because it is too much of a risk or because you are undertaking refurbishment then you will need to know the type of material you are dealing with to decide who can remove it. In the U.K. and Jersey there are the Asbestos licensing regulations which detail the types of materials that can only be worked on by licensed Asbestos Contractors. Non licensed asbestos products can be worked on by non licensed contractors however it is essential to be able to differentiate between the two and to ensure that both licensed and non licensed works are carried out in accordance with the Control of Asbestos at Work legislation and guidance.

Who should do this surveying and management work?

There is nothing to stop you from doing this work however the HSE explain that whomever conducts surveys and risk assessment should be competent to do so. They should have appropriate qualifications, sound knowledge of building structures and be competent to assess the risks from materials located.

There is currently only one accreditation system in place for Asbestos inspection bodies and this accreditation is undertaken by UKAS or the United Kingdom Accreditation Service. UKAS regularly audit organisations to check their competency against a European standard ISO/IEC 17020.

UKAS also accredit laboratories who test bulk samples for identification and who provide air monitoring and clearance work for Asbestos removal operations. Whenever you require these services you must use a company accredited to do this work. The European standard for this work in ISO/IEC 17025.

The asbestos risks cannot be ignored and they will not go away unless they are properly managed. The cornerstone of such management is professional knowledge of the problems, the solutions and how to apply them and this only comes with many years of experience in dealing with asbestos issues.