

Written evidence from the London Fire Brigade (LFB) (ASB0019)

Introduction

London Fire Brigade (LFB) is London's fire and rescue service - one of the largest firefighting and rescue organisations in the world and we are here to make London a safer city. Decisions are made either by the London Fire Commissioner (the statutory fire and rescue authority for Greater London), the Mayor of London or the Deputy Mayor for Fire and Resilience. A Fire, Resilience and Emergency Planning Committee of the London Assembly holds the Commissioner, Mayor and Deputy Mayor to account.

Consultation response

- **What are the current risks posed by asbestos in the workplace? Which groups of workers are most at risk?**

London Fire Brigade (the Brigade) considers that there is still sufficient risk from asbestos in premises to warrant legislative control. The Brigade considers firefighters to be at low risk from asbestos because of the availability of protective equipment and other control measures. Building maintenance and building trades are considered to be at higher risk from asbestos.

The Brigade has policies with respect to the control of asbestos in our workplaces. These policies are drafted to implement the requirements of the Regulations and associated guidance. As such, asbestos risk within our workplace is well controlled.

Staff should also be aware, due to asbestos surveys and subsequent signage of the areas within their premises that contain asbestos, hence if damage occurs which could result in fibre release this should be reported and dealt with as a matter of urgency.

Fire and Rescue Services have limited awareness of the asbestos management in premises over which they have no control and which they may need to attend for operational incidents. The Brigade has an asbestos policy which delivers a procedure for dealing with asbestos at incidents. This includes the correct level of respiratory and protective equipment and decontamination strategies to reduce the asbestos risks to firefighters. Where asbestos is suspected or confirmed as present at an incident the Brigade can request, through specialist contractors, a survey of the asbestos containing materials that have been present.

By virtue of the interpretation of the Regulations firefighters are seen to be at increased risk from asbestos because of their operational activities. As such they are subject to asbestos specific medical surveillance in accordance with the Regulations. Brigade staff are able to record any incident where there may have been personal exposure to asbestos by electronic means such that there is a continuing record of any potential asbestos exposure for individuals.

- **How effective is the current legislative and regulatory framework for the management of asbestos?**

The Brigade considers that the current legislative and regulatory framework is suitable for the management of asbestos.

The requirement for the duty holder of non-domestic premises to inform the Emergency Services (in particular the Fire Service – as specified in the ACOP) is helpful in that it provides us with information regarding asbestos risk. This information can however be difficult to manage because of the sheer quantity of building stock in London.

The loss of the exemption for vacuum cleaners has meant that we have had to purchase vacuum cleaners for dealing with asbestos contamination even though the legislation clearly states a wet decontamination is still required afterwards. The use of a vacuum cleaner is seen only as a means of reducing contamination prior to the wet decontamination and is really more of a control measure for the asbestos removal industry rather than the fire service.

- **How does HSE’s approach to managing asbestos compare to the approach taken in other countries? Are there lessons that the UK could learn from best practice elsewhere?**

The Brigade considers the HSE’s approach to managing asbestos to be suitable for the risk and general health and safety framework for the UK.

- **How does HSE measure and report its progress in mitigating the risks of asbestos?**

The Brigade has no response to this question.

- **Does HSE keep adequate records of asbestos in public buildings?**

Keeping records of asbestos in public or other buildings is a challenging area. Fire and Rescue Services struggle to maintain updated asbestos records for buildings because of the sheer volume of building stock. A centralised system of asbestos risk in buildings for the UK would assist in managing this issue.

- **Is HSE making best use of available technology and systems to monitor the safety of asbestos which remains in buildings?**

Fire and Rescue Services would benefit from the HSE implementing a centralised electronic solution monitoring asbestos risk in buildings that they could access.

- **Does HSE commit adequate resources to asbestos management in line with the level of risk?**

The Brigade has no response to this question.

- **How robust is the available data about the risks and impact of asbestos in the workplace? What gaps in evidence need to be filled?**

The risks and impact from asbestos are well understood, although the scale of asbestos-related ill health could be better publicised.

Fire and rescue services would benefit from a clearer definition in the Regulations of the term ‘workplace’ as Fire and Rescue Services will attend buildings not in our control, and therefore they have no influence on asbestos management in those premises, for the purposes of operational incidents. Fire and Rescue Services will however consider those premises, not in our control, to be their workplace while that incident is taking place.

- **Is HSE drawing on a wide body of international and national regulatory and industry expertise to inform its approach to the management of asbestos safety in buildings?**

The Brigade has no response to this question.

- **How effectively does HSE engage with external stakeholders and experts about its approach to the regulation of asbestos?**

The Brigade has no response to this question.

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