

ASBESTOS KILLS

Asbestos is the biggest single cause of work-related deaths in Britain, with past exposure killing an estimated 4,000 people every year. This figure is expected to grow to over 10,000 a year by 2015. The cancers asbestos causes can take many years to develop; often they do not appear until at least 25 years after exposure.

Yet despite a ban on its use, asbestos is still present in around one and a half million workplaces. Often there is no record of where the asbestos is, or what condition it is in. That means that workers can still become exposed to this killer fibre.

All forms of asbestos are dangerous, whatever some employers may claim. Maintenance and building workers are especially at risk, but so is anyone who works around exposed asbestos or who works in an area where asbestos fibres are present.

There are regulations to prevent exposure to asbestos, but these are often ignored and there is not enough enforcement.

Although there are plans to introduce tougher regulations later this year (2006), safety representatives must act now to make sure that no more workers are exposed to asbestos.

SAFETY REPRESENTATIVES CHECKLIST

- **Has your employer got a system for identifying and locating any materials that may contain asbestos?**
- **Are the records up to date and accessible?**
- **Have all areas that may contain asbestos been labelled?**
- **is there an agreed plan for managing and/or removing the asbestos?**
- **Are any undamaged materials containing asbestos regularly inspected?**
- **Have all staff been trained on asbestos risks, given information on its location and instructed on precautions?**
- **Are contractors always notified of any materials or suspected materials before commencing work?**
- **Are there procedures to record any exposure and inform any employees who may have been exposed?**
- **Are safety representatives fully consulted on all aspects of the asbestos policy?**

**For more information contact your union or check the TUC website
www.tuc.org.uk/asbestos**