

## **Greater Manchester Asbestos Victims Support Group**

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### **Asbestos Protection Crisis**

#### ***“Housing Trusts fail to warn tenants of asbestos”***

Mesothelioma cancer patients, their families and MPs will gather on Action Mesothelioma Day, Friday 1<sup>st</sup> July to warn of an asbestos protection crisis.

12.30 pm release of doves in Lincoln Square, Brazennose St. Manchester

13.30 pm public meeting in Manchester Town Hall Manchester

They will say the crisis is a result of Government policy which:

- Has halted the HSE asbestos ‘Hidden Killer’ campaign
- Has cut HSE asbestos preventive work by 35%
- Fails to apply asbestos safeguards to tenants in social housing
- Proposes to allow tenants to undertake their own repairs

They will say that many Housing Trusts in Greater Manchester routinely fail to warn tenants about asbestos in their homes

**John Shiers** who suffers from mesothelioma and who led a campaign in the early 1980s about the dangers of asbestos in the Hulme flats in Manchester where he lived says: *“I was only ever exposed to asbestos living in the Hulme flats in Manchester which were riddled with asbestos. We had to campaign to get information about asbestos and for the dangers of asbestos to be taken seriously. Thirty years later, tenants are still not told where asbestos is in their homes despite the dangers of disturbing asbestos. This must change.”*

**Tony Whitston**, GMAVSG, says: *“We asked the major housing trusts in the ten local authorities in Greater Manchester about their policy on notifying their tenants about asbestos in their homes. We are very concerned that some housing trusts provide no information whatsoever and others provide very little information. We were shocked that some refused to complete our survey despite freedom of information requests and others simply failed to respond. Two housing trusts stood out, providing information to tenants on the exact location of asbestos in their homes. We would like all housing trusts to follow their lead.”*

For information please contact Tony Whitston: 0161 636 7555 / 07748189837

## **NOTES FOR EDITORS**

### Mesothelioma

Mesothelioma is a fatal tumour found principally in the lung pleura for which the only known cause is exposure to asbestos and life expectancy is about 12 months from diagnosis. Uniquely, among asbestos-related diseases mesothelioma can be caused by low exposure to asbestos.

### Mesothelioma Incidence UK

The 2008 latest figures for mesothelioma diagnoses is 2,400 and in 2008 there were 2,249 deaths. Mesothelioma is one of the top 20 fatal cancers. The female death rate for mesothelioma is rising exponentially and is more than three times higher in the UK than in the US.

### Mesothelioma Incidence Greater Manchester

In 2010 GMAVSG visited 85 newly diagnosed mesothelioma patients

Jan-June 2011 GMAVSG visited 55 newly diagnosed mesothelioma patients.

### HSE

The HSE launched a campaign, "*The Hidden Killer*", to warn trades people, especially maintenance workers, of the dangers of low exposures to asbestos in buildings which contain asbestos. That campaign has been halted due to budget cuts. The HSE budget has been cut by 35%. Campaigners are calling for the reinstatement of the campaign and cancellation of the cuts.

### Domestic Premises

Asbestos is estimated to be present in 90% of all public sector housing. (*As Safe as Houses. A Report for UCATT. Dr. Linda Waldman and Heather Williams June 2009*)

### Legal Requirement

The Control of Asbestos regulations 2006 (CAR 2006) do NOT apply to domestic properties. The construction trade union, UCATT, and the Forum are calling for CAR 2006 to apply to domestic premises.

Most Social Housing Landlords do not inform tenants of where asbestos is located in their premises. Campaigners are calling on social housing landlords to provide a register of asbestos found in social housing.

### GMAVSG Survey of Housing Trusts in Greater Manchester

Sixteen housing trusts surveyed in Greater Manchester. Eight completed the survey.

Five sent a letter. Three did not reply

Of the thirteen trusts:

- Two trusts completed the survey showing full information to tenants about the location of asbestos in their homes.
- Six trusts completed the survey showing partial information, although in three cases this is limited to a generic web site leaflet.
- One trust wrote to say they do not provide any information to tenants.
- One trust wrote to say they have a website asbestos leaflet.
- One trust responded, blandly confirming compliance with HSG264<sup>1</sup>.
- Two trusts wrote to say that they refuse to complete the survey or give us any information.

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<sup>1</sup> HSE guidance HSG264 Asbestos: The survey guide