

## **Asbestos in schools a ‘public health danger’ to people of all ages throughout Scotland, leading campaigners warn**

An event in Glasgow tomorrow (Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> April) organised by two Scottish charities will hear that the presence of asbestos in school buildings is an urgent public health threat in Scotland.

Sarah Lyons, an official with the National Union of Teachers and a member of the Joint Union Asbestos Committee (JUAC) in England and Wales is one of the keynote speakers at *“Asbestos: Challenges today and the threat to future generations”*, organised by Clydebank Asbestos Group and Asbestos Action and supported by Digby Brown Solicitors.

In her address to the conference, Sarah Lyons will discuss the results of a recent JUAC report which showed that asbestos is still present in up to 75% of schools in England, and the work the group has done to raise awareness of the public health threat in this area, including securing a Department for Education review of its Asbestos Policy for Schools and new guidance to schools on dealing with the threat.

Fraser Simpson, Head of Industrial Disease at Digby Brown Solicitors, is calling for the Scottish Government and Local Authorities to follow England’s lead and take action. He said:

“The recent report into asbestos in schools in England makes for grim reading. Given the age of many school estates in Scotland, it is likely that a very high percentage of them contain asbestos. More needs to be done to raise awareness of this.

“It really is shocking to think that asbestos is still present in buildings which tens of thousands of children attend every day and where people go to work. This is a public health danger which needs to be addressed. The UK Government has taken action and we need to see the same urgency in Scotland.”

“We firmly believe that the Scottish Government should do more to make the public aware of the presence of asbestos in public buildings and plan for the phased and safe removal of asbestos.”

“Government will point to policies designed to protect those who may be in the vicinity of any construction or removal works involving asbestos. As long as asbestos remains undisturbed, there is no immediate risk to the public.

“However, if employees, members of the public, teachers and children are not aware of the presence of asbestos within the public buildings and schools which are occupied daily, then how can they guard against inadvertent disturbance?”

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#### **Notes to Editors**

1. Sarah Lyons is Principal Officer: Pay, Conditions and Bargaining with the National Union of Teachers, responsible for the organisations Health & Safety work, including asbestos. Sarah is closely involved in the work of the Joint Union Asbestos Committee. Sarah is also a member of the Health and Safety Executive’s ‘Myth busters challenge’ panel and has been involved in projects about teacher stress in Europe, through the education arm of the European TUC.
2. The Joint Union Asbestos Committee (JUAC) is formed from the union members of the Asbestos in Schools Group (AIS), including ASCL, ATL, GMB, NAHT, NASUWT, NUT, UNISON, Unite the Union and Voice. The JUAC unions represent teachers, school leaders and support staff in England and Wales.
3. Further information on the work of the Joint Union Asbestos Committee, including its campaign to raise awareness around the issue of asbestos in schools, is available at <http://www.juac.org.uk/news/>

4. “Asbestos: Challenges today and the threat to future generations”, is a one-day event taking place in The Glasgow Science Centre on Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> April, 10am – 3pm.
5. The event is organised by Clydebank Asbestos Group and Asbestos Action and supported by Digby Brown Solicitors.
6. Clydebank Asbestos Group is a volunteer organisation set up in 1992 to help provide support, advice and information for victims of asbestos and their families.
7. Asbestos Action is a Scottish charity that has been set up to assist sufferers of asbestos related diseases. The charity was formed by a group of people who either have an asbestos related illness or have cared for someone with an asbestos linked condition.
8. Digby Brown are Scotland’s largest specialist personal injury solicitors. The firm’s Industrial Disease departments have won a number of landmark legal rulings in favour of those seeking justice and compensation after developing asbestos related conditions through exposure at work or elsewhere.

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