

No. 346/2020

30 June 2020

Our Ref: P8/20

**To: All Branches**

Dear Colleagues,

## **Action Mesothelioma Day 2020 - Friday 3 July 2020**

Mesothelioma is a deadly cancer caused by breathing in asbestos dust.

Mesothelioma takes a long time to develop. It's normal for people to get the first symptoms 30 to 40 years after they were first exposed to asbestos. See the attached excellent Mesothelioma Information and Factsheet produced with the co-operation of the British Lung Foundation who along with Asthma UK organise 'Action Mesothelioma Day'. The Information and Factsheet covers; What is Mesothelioma? What are the symptoms of Mesothelioma? How is Mesothelioma diagnosed? How is Mesothelioma treated? Support for Mesothelioma victims.

This deadly asbestos-related cancer continues to kill thousands every year and there is no let-up in the annual UK death toll of around 2,500, with a similar number being diagnosed every year as having got it.

Action Mesothelioma Day is commemorated every year on the first Friday in July to remember the tens of thousands of people in the UK who have died from Mesothelioma. However, these are not normal times due to the Coronavirus/Covid-19 Pandemic and government lockdown restrictions, and the events and gatherings which are normally organised will not take place this year. However, The UK Mesothelioma Alliance (UKMA) will be hosting a Virtual Mesothelioma event on the day.

### **Virtual Mesothelioma Day Event Friday 3 July 2020, 10:40-12:00 Organised By The UK Mesothelioma Alliance (UKMA):**

The UKMA is producing a national virtual Action Mesothelioma Day event that we encourage anyone interested or affected by Mesothelioma to join. The national virtual event will include a mix of patient stories and clinical expert presentations. It will run from 10.40am to 12 noon with the observation of a minutes' silence at 11am. The UKMA would also like to help promote local Action Mesothelioma Day 2020 events. **(See Event Flyer attached).**

To join the event, follow this link:

<https://www.ukmesoalliance.org/projects/virtual-action-mesothelioma-day-2020/>

## Order of Events (10:40-12:00)

- Welcome Dawn McKinley, Chair of UK Mesothelioma Alliance
- A minute of silence
- Nursing support Sarah Morgan, Mesothelioma Clinical Nurse Specialist
- Patient voice Mavis Nye
- Clinical Trials Professor Sanjay Popat, Consultant Thoracic Medical Oncologist at the Royal Marsden Hospital and Professor of Thoracic Oncology at the Institute of Cancer Research
- Asbestos awareness David Gold, Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH) Vice-President
- Patient Voice Paul Cook
- Thanks & Close Dawn McKinley

Action Mesothelioma events are normally organised across the UK by a number of organisations, supported by trade unions including the CWU, The Hazards Campaign Network, asbestos lawyers, asbestos campaigners, the London Hazards Centre, Manchester Hazards Centre and victims' families and friends. These events both commemorate and remember the people that have died from asbestos related diseases and usually involve victims' families and expert speakers on the subject. Campaigning for the removal of all asbestos in the UK by the TUC, Trade Unions, Hazards and anti-asbestos organisations continues nevertheless despite the Coronavirus Pandemic and government lockdown measures.

Action Mesothelioma Day provides a platform for trade unions and health and safety campaigners to show solidarity with the Mesothelioma victims and their families. It provides the opportunity to raise the profile of the continuing asbestos dangers, a disease which is entirely preventable and which leaves behind devastated families feeling a deep sense of loss and anger that the life of a loved one has been cut short. It is the families of Mesothelioma victims who bear the greatest financial cost. HSE statistics show that families pay 57%, the state (taxpayers) 23%, leaving criminally negligent employers who cause the harm just 20%.

Mesothelioma is a preventable disease that with proper safety measures in place would be in decline. But the thousands of people that die a painful death each year are victims of inadequate safety procedures and sadly the criminal failings of some employers who do not properly manage health and safety where asbestos is and who have scant regard for their workers.

Although asbestos was finally banned from being used in the UK in 1999, it can be found in buildings everywhere. If a house or workplace was built before the 1980s, it is likely to have some asbestos-containing materials in its structure. It is estimated that around 70% of schools have asbestos in them. An under-funded HSE, workers without a trade union in precarious employment, in a culture of fear, zero-hours, agency working and false self-employment are all part of a working environment fraught with danger for workers and allowing the worst of employers to literally get away with murder.

Certain occupations are at greater risk of breathing in asbestos fibres. Construction and demolition workers, heating & ventilation engineers, plasterers, carpenters, joiners, plumbers, roofing contractors, demolition crews, painters, pipe fitters, maintenance workers and increasingly teachers employed in old school buildings. It's not unusual to get the first symptoms 30 to 40 years after being first exposed to asbestos. Children being exposed to asbestos in schools are more at risk of developing Mesothelioma because of their greater life expectancy.

Sometimes described as the silent epidemic, Mesothelioma will still be the cause of thousands of deaths long after Coronavirus is under control unless urgent action is taken.

The failure to act quickly enough in response to asbestos dangers over the years has cost thousands of workers lives.

We need a properly funded, resourced and expertly staffed Health and Safety Executive with more field force inspectors, strictly enforcing health and safety laws, free from the government interference seen over the last decade, if we are to stop people inhaling asbestos fibres for good. Action Mesothelioma Day is an opportunity to reflect on the lives lost and also continue our commitment in the CWU to continue fighting for our members to protect them and future generations from this deadly disease and other asbestos related diseases.

### **Mesothelioma Facts:**

- At present no effective treatment or cure exists for Mesothelioma.
- Mesothelioma is a rare and incurable form of cancer, caused almost exclusively through the inhalation of asbestos fibres.
- Worldwide around 40,000 people die every year from Mesothelioma, a fatal asbestos-related cancer.
- The HSE expects deaths from Mesothelioma to continue to rise for the next four to five years.
- Asbestos was used very extensively all the way up to 1999 when it was finally banned in the UK.
- 100,000 tonnes of asbestos containing materials still exists in UK buildings built before 2000.
- There are three main types of asbestos - blue, brown and white. Blue is the most toxic but no type is safe.
- In the UK, blue and brown asbestos materials were banned outright in 1985 while the import, sale and reuse of white asbestos was outlawed in 1999 by the Tony Blair led Labour Government.
- Asbestos related diseases are; Pleural disease (diffuse thickening or plaques), Asbestosis (scarring of the lungs and inflamed airways), Lung Cancer (Tumours) and Mesothelioma (Cancer of the lining of the Lungs or Abdomen).

### **UK Asbestos Law**

Employers are legally bound to survey, identify and manage or remove asbestos- containing materials in their buildings and those employing workers must find out if asbestos-containing materials are present and plan the work to avoid disturbing these materials and exposing workers. Workers should stop and ask if they are unsure or are suspicious that something may be asbestos or if they think the work might need to be carried out by a licensed contractor. They should follow the plan of work and work method statement and safe system of work making sure they have been properly trained and informed before they start. Further detailed information and advice is available from the CWU HQ Health, Safety & Environment department, Health and Safety Executive and Local Authority Environmental Health Departments.

### **British Lung Foundation and The Taskforce for Lung Health**

The British Lung Foundation aims to prevent lung disease by campaigning for positive change in the UK's lung health, raising awareness about lung disease, the dangers that cause it, and how to look after your lungs. The Taskforce for Lung Health involves 30 organisations plus individuals, including the NHS, charities and professional organisations who together have adopted a five year plan and framework to improve the nation's lung health and provide better care for people with lung disease.

**British Lung Foundation's Action Mesothelioma Day Website:**

<https://www.blf.org.uk/support-for-you/mesothelioma/action-mesothelioma-day>

**Attachments:**

- Mesothelioma Information Fact Sheet
- Taskforce For Lung Health Members
- UKMA Virtual Action Mesothelioma Day 2020 Event Flyer

Yours sincerely



**Dave Joyce**  
**National Health, Safety & Environment Officer**

