

**COMMITTEE ON CARCINOGENICITY OF CHEMICALS IN FOOD,
CONSUMER PRODUCTS AND THE ENVIRONMENT**

Relative Vulnerability of Children to Asbestos compared to Adults.

Background

1. The Department for Education (DfE) has asked for advice from the COC on the vulnerability of children to asbestos to inform the discussions of its independent "Asbestos in Schools Steering Group". The aims, terms of reference and membership of this group are attached at Annex A.
2. The Health and Safety Executive's scientific advisory committee, the Working Group on Action to Control Chemicals (WATCH), which advises the Advisory Committee on Toxic Substances (ACTS) and HSE on scientific and technical issues relating to the assessment and control of health risks from chemicals, has recently examined the risks from low level exposure to asbestos in adults. It concluded that a definitive numerical value could not be placed on the risks from low level asbestos exposure and stated that "the risk will be lower, the lower the exposure, but "safe" thresholds are not identifiable". Therefore, the COC secretariat considered that it would be impossible to advise on the absolute risk of asbestos in children, for whom there are far fewer data. It was agreed with DfE and DH that the COC would be asked to advise on the relative vulnerability of children to asbestos compared to adults.
3. At this meeting, Members are asked to consider this introductory paper and to advise on the strategy proposed by the secretariat to assist the COC's deliberations on this issue. A full discussion of the topic is scheduled for the November meeting.

Strategy for review

- 4.1 The secretariat will prepare a review of any epidemiological literature on children and asbestos. Studies which will be particularly useful are those which have investigated the susceptibility of children and adults in a similarly exposed population but, from an initial search of the literature, there are very few of those. The secretariat will also review any literature from developing countries on occupational exposure of children to asbestos and the development of mesothelioma in later life. Is the Committee aware of any other relevant epidemiological data?
- 4.2 The secretariat will also prepare a review of animal data from the animal mesothelioma model. A review of this data may benefit the Committee's discussion on comparative changes and consequences in the animals due to juvenile exposure with exposure in later life to asbestos.

4.3 The secretariat intends, if possible, to obtain data on the levels of asbestos found in school buildings in the UK. Information is available in the literature on levels of asbestos found in school buildings in the US and Italy. This information may be available within the HPA. Can the Committee suggest any other sources?

4.4 For information to the Committee, the secretariat will provide the WATCH statement and if Members would find it useful, invite someone, probably from the HSE secretariat, to talk about WATCH's discussions, as background to the COC's discussions.

4.5 The secretariat is identifying an expert in juvenile respiratory physiology who could advise the committee about how asbestos might behave in children's respiratory tract and whether this might make them more or less susceptible. The secretariat is also identifying an expert in inflammation who could advise the committee on how a child's body responds to inflammation and whether this changes with age and compares to that of an adult. The Committee may also co-opt on one or more experts in asbestos epidemiology to assist with the discussion. Does the Committee consider that it would be useful to coopt experts from any other fields?

5. Does the Committee have any further suggestions?

Secretariat
June 2011

DfE Terms of Reference for Steering Group on Asbestos in Schools

25 March 2011

1. Aims

- 1.1. To promote the effective management, by schools and by local authorities, of asbestos in schools and other children's settings.
- 1.2. To raise awareness of and promote the need to ensure proper management of asbestos in schools and other children's settings.
- 1.3. To review and contribute to the development of guidance and targeted training materials on asbestos management for school and Local Authority staff.

2. Terms of Reference

- 2.1. To consider the risks posed by asbestos in schools and other children's settings
- 2.2. To contribute to the development of the DfE/HSE/Partnerships for Schools (PfS) plans to ensure that asbestos is competently managed in schools.
- 2.3. To review progress against DfE/HSE/PfS plans to promote the effective management of asbestos in schools.
- 2.4. To ensure that key stakeholders are informed of relevant work that is undertaken to ensure that asbestos is managed effectively in schools.
- 2.5. To provide input to DfE, PfS and HSE in the preparation of any asbestos guidance that is drafted specifically for schools and children's settings.
- 2.6. To promote good practice in asbestos management in schools by local authorities, dioceses, school governors, head teachers, bursars and school business managers, parents' groups and the teaching and support staff unions – in the independent and maintained sectors.
- 2.7. To share good practice in documentation and systems in place to effectively record and manage the risks from asbestos in schools.
- 2.8. To provide an input into the development of any common standards, tools or documentation for schools, governors, dioceses and local authorities on asbestos management.

3. Membership

- 3.1. The group is convened by DfE and chaired by a senior civil servant from DfE. The group will report to ministers and make recommendations about ongoing activities, as necessary.
- 3.2. Membership of the steering group comprises the following key representatives of organisations and invited stakeholders.
- 3.3. Annette Brooke, MP for Mid Dorset and Poole, Chair of Asbestos in Schools sub-Committee of The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Occupational Safety and Health
- 3.4. Teaching union representative, rotated between the unions
- 3.5. Non teaching union representative, rotated between the unions
- 3.6. Employers' representative, nominated by Local Government Employers (LGE)
- 3.7. Asbestos management representative - Chair of Asbestos Testing and Consultants Association (AtaC)
- 3.8. A local authority officer with relevant responsibilities, for asbestos management in schools
- 3.9. Jim Sheridan, Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Safety and Health
- 3.10. Michael Lees (representing asbestos victims)
- 3.11. Representative from the Independent Schools Bursars Association
- 3.12. Representative from the National Association of Head Teachers
- 3.13. Representative from the National Governors Association has been invited
- 3.14. Co-opted expert members if and when required
- 3.15. DfE, HSE and PfS will be invited to meetings as policy leads and technical experts, to update the project board on progress and to respond to issues raised.
- 3.16. Representative from the National College for Leadership in Schools and Children's Services when its role as trainer of head teachers and school business managers is on the agenda.