

# Quick, cheap & dirty

**A landlord and building contractor have been fined after large quantities of asbestos fibres were released from the demolition of a conservatory at a rented property. Birmingham Magistrates' Court heard how the landlord commissioned a building contractor to replace a conservatory containing asbestos panels. Asbestos was spread as the panels were removed in a 'haphazard and uncontained' way. An investigation by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) found that the landlord should have had an asbestos survey carried out prior to work beginning, and the building contractor should not have started work without one. GGF health and safety director Phil Pinnington discusses the correct removal of asbestos insulating building board (AIB)**

Historically Asbestos Insulating Board was to be found behind cladding around windows and in many self-build conservatories. As the company contracted to replace old windows or a conservatory are you sure there isn't any AIB present? This continues to be a real challenge.

Most people in any building related trade will be well aware of the risks of asbestos exposure. It's been well documented and there are many people's lives that have been touched either directly or indirectly to conditions linked to asbestos exposure. That said, there is a problem with how installers are addressing this issue.

In 2012 the Asbestos Liaison Group (ALG) which is led by an eminently qualified expert on the subject, issued a guidance memo. The aim of this was to provide practical guidance for installers to follow when faced with AIB. Unfortunately in its current form it does put high expectations on installers which do come at a cost. That said it should not be allowed to discourage responsible asbestos management.

Since 2016 we, at the GGF on behalf of the industry, have lobbied HSE to look at reviewing the guidance. After meeting HSE's director of construction we are encouraged that a review is under way and changes will be considered.

We are committed to the protection of individuals and the environment but, increasing evidence is showing that potential customers of installation companies are refusing to pay for expensive enclosures as directed in the memo.

The HSE is however concerned that homeowners are either removing AIB themselves or unwittingly employing unscrupulous workers who are happy to declare the boards as asbestos cement or plasterboard when it's clearly AIB. This is simply irresponsible and if fibres are not controlled they risk exposing the homeowner to asbestos with all the health implications.

If you are an installer; who may, even occasionally, come across AIB you must make sure you and your employees are aware of what it looks like. If in doubt get it tested and follow the control procedures. Prosecutions are not made against the homeowner it is the installer that stands in the dock so don't be that person answering to a charge.

The GGF has produced an asbestos guide for homeowners which is free to download from the GGF website: <https://www.ggf.org.uk/publications/health-and-safety-publications/asbestos-dont-play-russian-roulette>



**Phil Pinnington, health and safety director for the GGF**

[asbestos-ref-60-8/](#) this provides clear information for homeowners as to where to find asbestos and what the risks are. It also directs them to further information.

We as a responsible industry need to be part of the solution here. We must consider how to protect customers from the risks associated with asbestos and being properly and independently informed can be a significant first step. □

*The GGF's health and safety committee meets quarterly to discuss key issues affecting the industry. If you are interested in finding out more about the GGF and its health and safety function, please email [info@ggf.org.uk](mailto:info@ggf.org.uk)*

# Cause and control

**Jane Embury, marketing director at Wrightstyle, the steel and aluminium glazing company, looks at accidental fires in the workplace...and how to avoid them**

In 2017, fire crews in England attended over 560,000 incidents, 34% fewer than ten years ago. Of those, only about 170,000 were fires, and over 220,000 were false alarms.

Every year in the UK more than 20,000 non-residential fires are reported, with many of those happening in our workplaces.

While there are a large number of reasons why fires start, many incidents could be avoided if people better understood and managed the most common causes of fire.

While the overall incidence of workplace fires continues to fall, they do tend to be larger and more complex, not only potentially posing a risk to life but to the continuity and survival of the company affected.

Preventing workplace fire loss requires knowledge of both the underlying ignition risks and, if fire does break out, the reasons why the fire might spread.

The main element that then determines the severity of a fire is the availability of a fuel load – the combustible materials that a fire needs to develop and grow.

Faulty electrics are the biggest cause of workplace fires and workplaces are legally obliged to properly maintain all electrical equipment and to conduct portable appliance testing (PAT) at least annually.

These tests ensure that electrical goods are fit for purpose and remain in good working order. Failure to test annually is therefore not only a fire risk in itself, but could result in legal penalty.

What's also needed is a comprehensive fire safety risk assessment, particularly vital if combustible and flammable materials are used in the workplace.

That assessment will then guide a fire safety plan to ensure the most appropriate storage, handling and disposal of flammable materials.

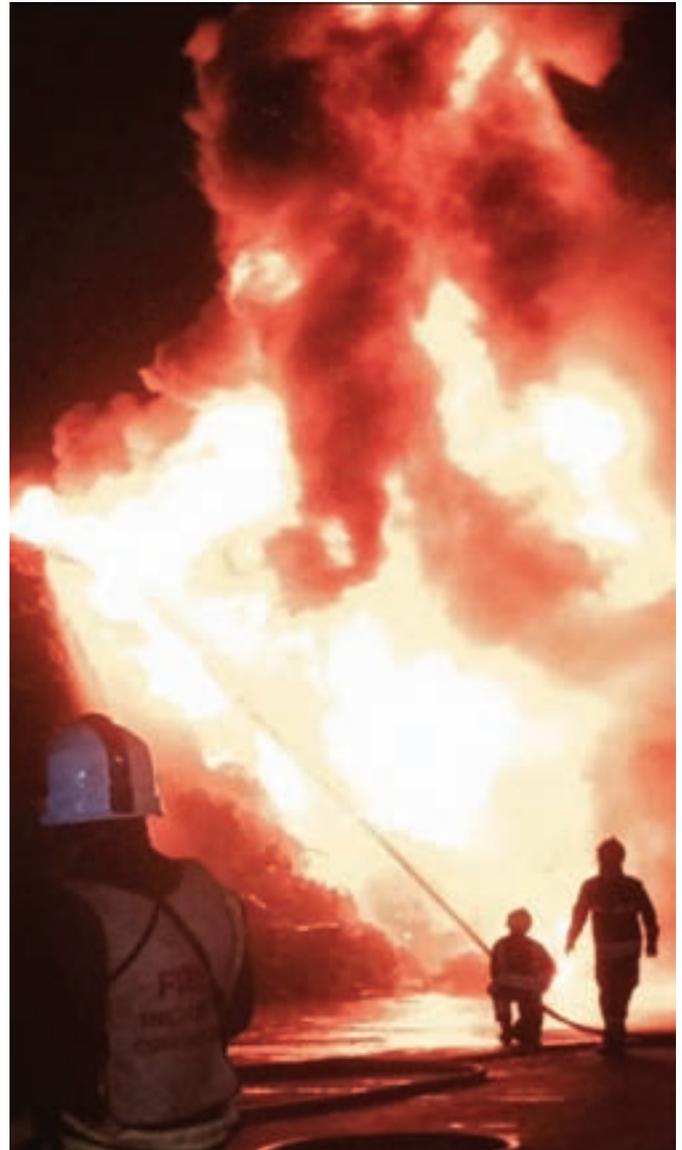
Again, failure to comply with the fire and safety regulations is a fire risk in itself and, again, could result in prosecution.

But it's not just complacency that's the main fire risk, because accidents can happen – for example, an employee spilling liquid onto electrical equipment.

What's then crucial is that the workplace has sufficient and appropriate fire safety equipment, and that staff are fully trained in their use.

But while accidents can and do happen, a bigger threat is negligence because, in the event of serious incident, the company concerned may lose any right to insurance recompense, leading inevitably to financial difficulty and possible closure.

While every company must have a named person responsible for fire safety, everyone in an organisation also has personal responsibility, because everyone must be aware of fire risk, proper procedures, and what to do in the event of fire.



As we also constantly point out, one of the main lessons for building designers and owners is not simply to incorporate passive and active fire systems, but to look at the whole building's capacity to withstand a fire.

That's why advanced glazing systems are so important, either for the exterior envelope of a building or for internal screens and fire doors, providing up to 120 minutes of protection against the spread of fire, smoke or toxic gases. Advanced glazing systems also do one additional thing. By containing the fire, they minimise damage to that company's workplace and better provide continuity of operations. It is, if you like, an investment in peace of mind. □

[www.wrightstyle.co.uk](http://www.wrightstyle.co.uk)