

Removing Soffits Containing Asbestos Insulating Board

Historically Asbestos Insulating Board (AIB) was to be found behind cladding around windows. It has occasionally been reported as packing under frames that haven't fitted into apertures so, as installers, this is a real challenge, writes Phil Pinnington of the GGF.



Most people both inside and outside our industry 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 the HSE are currently guiding installers.

In 2012 the Asbestos Liaison Group (ALG) which is led by an eminently qualified expert on the subject from HSE Scientific Services and, representatives from the asbestos licensing companies as well as The British Occupational Hygiene Society (BOHS), embarked on a consultation exercise with a handful of GGF members. The aim of this exercise was to provide practical guidance for installers to follow when faced with AIB.

At this consultation certain controls were proposed which our members felt didn't consider the consumer and what action they may take. Unfortunately most of what was foreseen has now become a reality.

Some of the issues include:

- Full enclosure of a property where AIB in soffits has been found and there is no guarantee that removal could be completed without the material crumbling.
- When building an enclosure there must be a separate staircase for removers to climb up and down.

In 2015 HSE Inspectors started to use the contents of this memo as justification for issuing prohibition notices and quickly the cost of AIB removal increased significantly. Some installers reading this article may have experience of this and the impact it has on their customers.

Since 2016 we, at the GGF on behalf of the industry have lobbied HSE to look at reviewing the guidance. It's important to say at this point that there is a commitment to the protection of individuals and the environment but, increasing evidence is showing that potential customers of installation companies are refusing to pay for enclosures as directed in the memo. They are undertaking the work themselves or using less than scrupulous builders who often tell the homeowner that it isn't AIB simply asbestos cement (which isn't controlled in the same way).

To date we have not been successful in furthering our campaign, however in May we succeeded in agreeing a date to meet with HSE's Director of Construction to place our argument for a review.

This meeting is scheduled to take place in July. Our aim is to work alongside HSE and review the structure and depth of the guidance.

In the meantime, if you're 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's the installer that stands in the dock so don't be that person answering to a charge. [f](#)