



Reminder about dangers associated with inserting pins and staples into walls and ceiling containing asbestos

With the approach of the festive season, the Joint Union Asbestos Committee (JUAC)¹ has issued a reminder about putting up Christmas decorations safely in schools.

The JUAC unions are asking staff to ensure that Christmas decorations, children's artwork and other materials are safely attached to ceilings and walls and are not attached to surfaces containing asbestos using pins or staples.

Use of pins or staples will result in the release of asbestos fibres which may be breathed in and which may cause disease many years later. Nearly 90 per cent of schools still contain asbestos and children are known to be particularly vulnerable because of the long latency of asbestos-related diseases such as mesothelioma.

The Department for Education advises that '*Putting drawing pins into walls as part of displays can release asbestos fibres. This activity **should not** be taking place in schools where asbestos is known to be present.*'²

This message needs to be repeated regularly - not just at Christmas - because of staff turnover and because messages can be forgotten over time. Many staff do not know whether asbestos is present in their school and even if they do know that it is present, they do not always know its location. Where it is not known whether asbestos is present, the law says that it must be assumed that it is present, until it can be proved otherwise. Any school built before 2000 is likely to contain asbestos.

JUAC advice to school staff is:

- If you do not know already whether your school contains asbestos, ask your head teacher **if** it does and if so **where** it is located.
- If there is asbestos in the walls or ceilings of classrooms, corridors, halls or anywhere else accessible to pupils and staff, **do not** pierce the area with any pins or staples. Find other ways to display decorations or artwork. If you cannot find out, you must assume that asbestos is present until you receive confirmation that it is not.
- Check that this message is reflected in your school's asbestos management plan and ask for staff to be given termly reminders about it.

Further Information

www.juac.org.uk

JUAC has partnered with Modern Governor to produce a free on-line learning module about asbestos in schools. <https://www.moderngovernor.com/access-asbestos-schools-e-learning-module/>.

¹ JUAC brings together all the teaching and support staff unions in the education sector to campaign for improved asbestos management to protect children and staff

² Asbestos in Schools: Where it may be located <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/asbestos-management-in-schools--2>