

Thames Laboratories specialise in the fields of Health & safety compliance and statutory inspections. They are specialists in the fields of asbestos management and [asbestos surveys](#)

, [legionella,](#)

[fire](#)

and energy services.

Asbestos Survey Firm Thames Laboratories are the latest to raise concerns over the latest Report issued by the HSE regarding the subject of asbestos in Schools. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) carried out an assessment of asbestos maintenance in 152 local authorities with responsibility for schools. The survey centred specifically on system-built schools in England, constructed between 1945 and 1980.

Of the 152 councils in England that have responsibility for providing education, 110 satisfied the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), via an online survey, that they have systems in place to meet their duties under the Control of Asbestos Regulations 2006.

The majority of local authorities in England with 'system-build' schools have procedures and precautions in place to manage asbestos safely, according to a survey and follow-up inspection programme.

Of the 152 councils surveyed, 110 provided satisfactory responses, but 42 councils required visits by HSE inspectors to ensure that they were also managing the risks from asbestos.

These inspections resulted in 32 councils being given further advice about practical

improvements and 10 authorities receiving enforcement notices to improve asbestos management standards - covering issues such as training and the need to provide information for tradespeople carrying out work at the schools. Thurrock Council was the only council given a prohibition notice, which meant a boiler room was immediately made off-limits.

The full list of councils served enforcement notices is:

- Bedford – 1 improvement notice
- Doncaster – 2 improvement notices
- Harrow – failed to respond to survey and served 3 improvement notices
- Kent – 2 improvement notices
- Lambeth – 2 improvement notices
- Medway – 2 improvement notices
- South Gloucestershire – 1 improvement notice
- Thurrock – 2 improvement notices and 1 prohibition notice
- Waltham Forest – 2 improvement notices
- Worcestershire – 1 improvement notice

Rosalind Roberts, the head of HSE's public services sector, said:

"We are satisfied that most local authorities were taking their responsibilities seriously when it comes to managing asbestos in system build schools.

"Where local authorities had fallen below acceptable standards, we took action to secure improvements. There are key lessons for the whole education sector. Those responsible for managing asbestos must be properly trained and management plans which set out the measures to be taken to manage the risks must be in place and readily available.

"If asbestos is properly managed, remains undamaged and undisturbed then its presence alone should not be a cause for concern. However, there is no room for complacency; managing asbestos in buildings needs effective and ongoing attention. Those most likely to be exposed are tradesmen who may disturb it through their work - so it is essential that their work is carefully planned and managed."

The survey and inspection programme were carried out in conjunction with the Department for Education (DfE), and is the latest in a series of initiatives to ensure that local authorities and schools responsible for system buildings are managing the risks from asbestos.

John Richards, Managing Director of [Thames Laboratories](#) is one of many who have openly questioned the validity of the Report.

He said:

"Although HSE show the report as being overwhelmingly positive, those who campaign on this subject have been highly critical of the format, the review and the reliance placed on the honesty of the Authority and its understanding of what is a system built school".

One authority in its response commented:

"As per my previous e-mail, I'm concerned about the quality of this questionnaire and the potential for misinterpretation when the contents are analysed. It does not show the full picture of asbestos management and only concentrates on a very small area. The questions are confusing and potentially misleading (far to open to interpretation)."

John Richards continues:

“Given that this comment is from one of the Authorities, it is important that we understand the basic requirement of this document, to ensure all in the garden is rosy. The questionnaire has not examined the detail required for asbestos management and many questions such as annual re-inspections have been carefully avoided”.

“Within the HSE’s detailed list we are aware of a number of authorities who have not undertaken re-inspections and who have had more than one asbestos issue over the last few years, but yet these are judged to be ok. The message created by this report is in complete contrast to that produced from the recent ATAC report at school level earlier in the year, where the report was conducted at school level and identified a number of key failing in most schools”.

The HSE say that another survey and inspection initiative will be undertaken between October 2010 and March 2011 to check compliance with the Control of Asbestos Regulations 2006 in those schools that fall outside local authority control.