Asbestos Information CIC

REPORT

PROPOSAL FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF

A NATIONAL ASBESTOS STRATEGY

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ASBESTOS MANAGEMENT IN THE UK: PROPOSAL FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF A NATIONAL ASBESTOS STRATEGY

ISBN: 978-1-0369-1547-6

Asbestos Information CIC

FOREWORD

It is a natural human instinct to protect ourselves from harm, as well as the people we love and care for. For decades, this basic instinct has been guiding and motivating thousands of patients and carers across the UK to push the Government to take action that will finally put an end to the ongoing loss of lives from asbestos exposure. As patients and carers, we know that the suffering and loss are needless and preventable. But, it needs the will and cooperation of the Government, the regulator, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), and the asbestos industry to ultimately rid the UK of asbestos.

In 2022, we were heartened by the Work and Pensions Select Committee Inquiry into the HSE's management of asbestos and its two core recommendations: the need for a central asbestos register and a long-term removal plan over 40 years. By 2025, we were encouraged by the HSE's shift from claiming asbestos is safe in situ to recognising the importance of understanding its risks and the need for complete removal of asbestos from buildings, and the need to build the ecosystem for this - "a workforce that is qualified to work with asbestos" with improved disposal facilities for this deadly carcinogen.

Asbestos Information CIC (Community Interest Company), is another significant step towards protecting the public, preventing exposure, and finally eradicating asbestos. We are delighted to see a collective of accredited industry professionals working together on a project to rationalise the method of recording and assessing the condition of asbestos materials. This project is a robust 'proof of concept' for a national asbestos database with the collation and analysis of millions of lines of asbestos survey data. Mapping this data locally identifies asbestos risks and provides a 'performance certificate' for buildings, crucial for safeguarding workers and the public. It also aids in prioritising and planning the safe removal of asbestos in the UK, focusing on the highest risks first.

In 2025, we, as patients and carers, are growing more hopeful that the UK will have a coherent national strategy on asbestos that protects the public from harm and makes the nation asbestos-free. In this spirit, we commend this report by Asbestos Information CIC on their crucial groundbreaking project. We now look to see collaboration and commitment from the Government, HSE, and the asbestos industry to take this work further, and we will continue to lend support to every effort to protect the public and rid us of asbestos. Lastly, we are truly thankful to everyone who has been steadfast in raising their voice, participating in meetings, asking the important questions, pushing for change and taking the initiative to make progress. Let's keep going.

Patients & Carers

Sue Farrall Richard Blunt Carolyn Quinn

Christine Emmett Charlotte Bailey

Denise Burwell

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over twenty-five years after the ban on the importation and use of all asbestos materials, the UK still has one of the highest levels of mesothelioma deaths in the world. Asbestos exposure continues to be the leading cause of work-related fatalities in the UK. There are signs that more people are now dying at younger ages, especially in jobs like teaching and nursing, due to asbestos exposure in workplaces like schools and hospitals.

In 2022, a Work and Pensions Select Committee inquiry, chaired by Sir Stephen Timms (now the minister responsible for the Health and Safety Executive), examined HSE's management of asbestos in buildings. The inquiry identified little evidence about the current condition and extent of asbestos in UK buildings and raised several concerns about existing asbestos regulations. This report aims to provoke discussion about two of the committees' central recommendations.

- *The development of a national database for asbestos-containing materials.*
- *A strategy for the future removal of asbestos.*

The Asbestos Information CIC (Community Interest Company) advocates a programme of preventative measures, including developing the following.

1. *A data-led approach, based on existing asbestos survey information, can more accurately identify the location of premises containing asbestos and the type and condition of asbestos in buildings. This approach would enable the establishment of a national database.*

2. *An Asbestos Information Certificate (AIC), similar to Energy Performance Certificates. This certificate would be displayed with a QR code in premises containing asbestos, providing an accessible overview of the asbestos condition, the effectiveness of its management, and a classification of the level of risk. The aim is to offer a clear and concise analysis for each site.*

3. *A UK database that can identify the priorities for a targeted, phased removal plan based on the types and conditions of asbestos and the buildings housing the most vulnerable*

In response to the Select Committee, the then government stated that developing a national database would be too complex and challenging. This report highlights what is possible with limited resources, supported by the Asbestos Information CIC's website, which illustrates how asbestos data from survey reports can be analysed and displayed geographically.

Addressing the UK's high asbestos presence is critical to the broader agenda for Net Zero and the £50 billion backlog in public building maintenance.[1] The current 'leave and manage' strategy has serious issues concerning cases of poorly maintained asbestos being regularly found, as highlighted in our reported data.

Our research has highlighted these issues further, alongside the need for systematically improved data collection.

The proposed **Asbestos Information Certificate (AIC)** will form part of a strategy to streamline asbestos data, inform national removal strategies, and aid compliance tracking through a central database. We recommend first testing and implementing the technology and approach using the AIC across the education sector to obtain an overall picture of the state of asbestos in schools. Expanding this approach to other sectors, such as the NHS estate, will provide a clearer pathway for more effective asbestos management in the UK.

The technology adopts a risk-based approach, prioritising public health to eliminate asbestos exposure. Critically, improvement requires strengthening regulatory frameworks and quality standards, particularly mandatory accreditation for asbestos surveys.

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[1] *National Audit Office, Government Building Maintenance Backlog Is at Least £49 Billion, Spending Watchdog Says, 22 January 2025, https://www.nao.org.uk/press-releases/government-building-maintenance-backlog-is-at-least-49-billion-spending-watchdog-says/*

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Asbestos is a naturally occurring fibrous mineral that poses serious health risks despite its widespread use. Exposure to asbestos fibres can lead to the development of incurable conditions, most notably mesothelioma and various asbestos-related cancers.

While many people recognise the term 'asbestos', fewer understand that it refers to a group of naturally occurring fibres. Historically, asbestos was used in a wide range of products, leading to varying levels of risk depending on the type of material and its application.

Asbestos use in the UK dates back to the Victorian era. Although the first documented asbestos-related death occurred over a century ago, the UK government did not ban asbestos entirely until 1999.

Today, asbestos exposure causes **over 5,000 deaths annually**, accounting for **40% of the UK's occupational cancer cases**.[2] The UK has one of the highest rates of mesothelioma deaths in the world, with evidence suggesting that the number of asbestos-related deaths in the UK may be far higher than indicated by government modelling.[3]

These deaths are estimated to cost society **around £1.2 billion annually, amounting to £24 billion over the last 20 years** — a figure more significant than the 'economic black hole' the government is currently facing.[4]

Growing evidence suggests that these death figures could be even higher. An increasing proportion of asbestos-related deaths now occurs among females and younger individuals, often due to non-occupational asbestos exposure.

This report encourages discussion on the importance of two rejected recommendations from the 2022 Department for Work and Pensions inquiry into the Health and Safety Executive's (HSE) management of asbestos. These recommendations involve creating a national database for asbestos-containing materials and formulating a strategy for future asbestos removal. It is essential to understand that these two issues are interconnected; a comprehensive strategy will determine the data that needs to be collected, and in turn, the data collection and analysis will inform the strategy's development.

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[2] *Eurostat, 'Mesothelioma Accounted for 2% of All Cancers in the EU', Eurostat News, 26 September 2024, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/edn-20240926-1*

[3] *Furuya, Sugio, et al. "Global Asbestos Disaster." International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, vol. 15, no. 5, 2018, p. 1000, https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph15051000*

[4] *Mesothelioma UK. Clearing the Air: The Costs and Benefits of Removing Asbestos from UK Schools and Hospitals. Mesothelioma UK, n.d., www.mesothelioma.uk.com/clearing-the-air/*

WHY CHANGE IS NEEDED:
CONTEXT OF ASBESTOS IN THE UK

Like all construction materials, asbestos will degrade over time and, if not properly maintained, may release asbestos fibres into the atmosphere. The State of Victoria in Australia has published the below, which shows the expected lifespan of commonly used asbestos materials. Based on research by the Victorian Eradication Agency, this indicates that many asbestos materials widely used in the UK have already exceeded their expected lifespan.

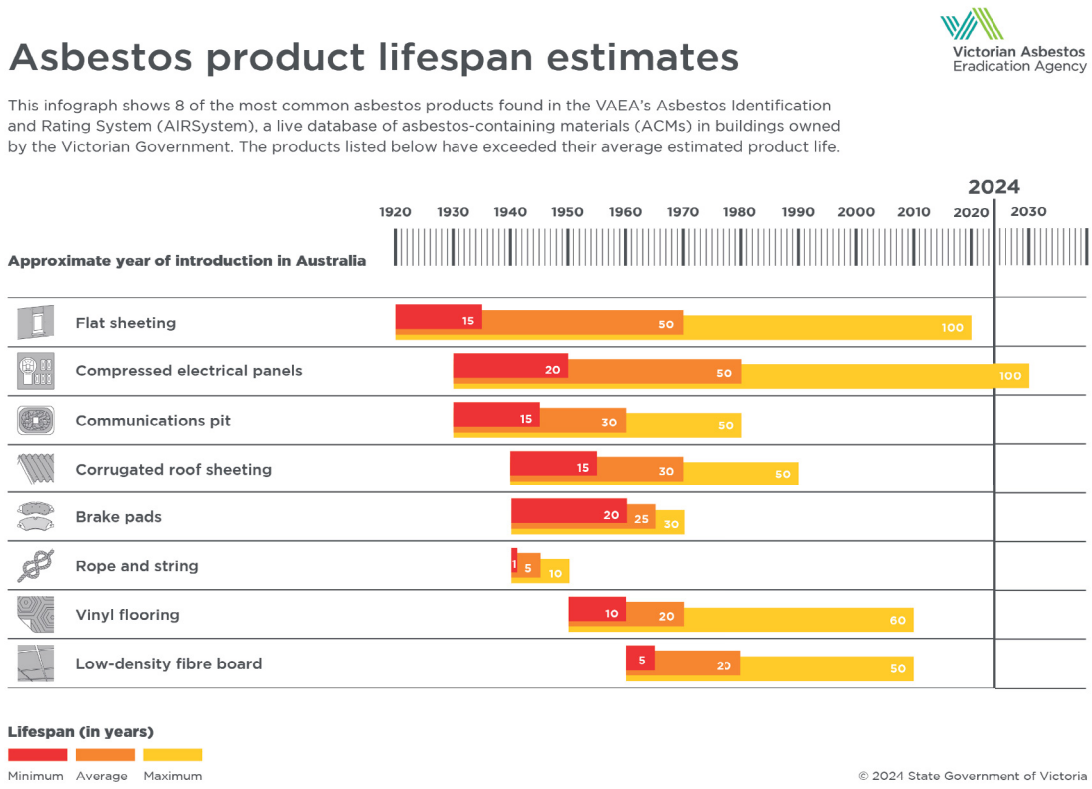

Figure 1 - Asbestos Product Lifespan Estimates - Victorian Asbestos Eradication Agency

The Committee on Carcinogenicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products, and the Environment has acknowledged that the younger a person is at the time of first asbestos exposure, the greater their lifetime risk of developing an asbestos-related illness.[5] While regulations mandate identifying and managing asbestos in workplaces, they do not extend to residential buildings. Although these measures have reduced deaths from occupational exposure, they inadequately address asbestos in non-work environments. There are increasing rates of asbestos-related deaths among women, particularly those in professions like teaching and nursing, where exposure likely occurred in their workplaces.

[5] *UK Health and Safety Executive. Relative Vulnerability of Children to Asbestos Compared to Adults. UK Government, 25 Feb. 2019, www.gov.uk/government/publications/relative-vulnerability-of-children-to-asbestos-compared-to-adults*

The HSE's current approach to asbestos is one of leave and manage, based on the idea that asbestos will be well-maintained and kept in good condition. Even at this level, deaths from asbestos are still higher than annual fire fatalities. Figure 2 illustrates the changes in mesothelioma and total asbestos deaths compared to fire and road accident fatalities over the past 20 years.

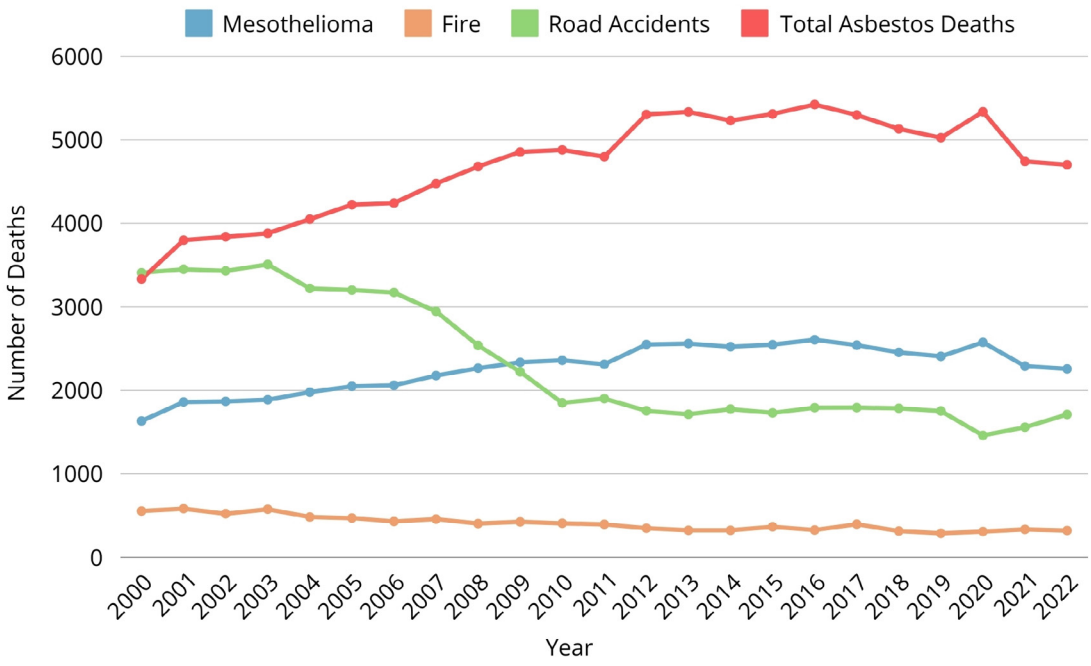

Figure 2 - Annual deaths due to Asbestos, Mesothelioma, Fire and Road Accidents in Great Britain (2000-2022)[6]

Our leave and manage approach will present several challenges expected to converge in the coming decades.

In November 2022, ATAC (Asbestos Testing and Consultancy Association) and NORAC (National Organisation of Asbestos Consultants) published a report revealing the extent of the asbestos problem in the UK.

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[6] *Data Sources: Road Accidents - RAS0101: Collisions, casualties and vehicles involved by road user type since 1925 (https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/reported-road-accidents-vehicles-and-casualties-tables-for-great-britain); Mesothelioma Deaths - MESO01-Death certificates mentioning mesothelioma (https://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/tables/index.htm); Fire Deaths - FIRE0501: Fatalities and non-fatal casualties by nation and population (https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/fire-statistics-data-tables#fatalities-and-casualties); The total asbestos deaths have been calculated based on mesothelioma, asbestos-related lung cancer (based on a ratio of one asbestos-related lung cancer for every mesothelioma deaths p. 7 https://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/assets/docs/asbestos-related-disease.pdf) and asbestosis deaths (ASIS01 - Death certificates mentioning asbestosis https://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/assets/docs/asis01.xlsx)*

The report analysed data collected over six months and illustrated that **71% of the recorded asbestos items had some damage**.[7] Indeed, HSE's assessment of asbestos management in schools identified that **7% of schools were not compliant** with guidance. An important factor missing from the HSE report was that all of the schools visited were aware that the HSE would be attending, and they had also been offered training before the visits.

The UK's use of asbestos and the prevalence of post-war construction means we not only have the highest levels of asbestos in Europe but also the highest rates of death. Once at the forefront of asbestos management, the UK is now falling rapidly behind other nations that have accepted the societal risk from asbestos and are developing strategies and removal programmes.

The UK's commitment to Net Zero means substantive work will be necessary to improve building insulation and heating. At the same time, a considerable proportion of UK public buildings have reached or exceeded their design age. Many of these are system-built properties constructed post-war when asbestos was used extensively.

Condition surveys have identified around £20 billion in backlog maintenance in the health and education sectors.[8] These costs exclude any provision for asbestos. Additionally, problems related to reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC) are impacting schools, hospitals, and other buildings.

In addition to the **£20 billion** already identified, the National Audit Office reported a backlog of **£50 billion** across all public buildings, increasing by **£800 million per annum**. The report states, 'Between 2019-20 and 2023-24, approximately 5,400 clinical service incidents occurred in the NHS every year due to property and infrastructure failures'.[9] Yet, against this background, asbestos is reportedly being managed in good condition.

Asbestos Information CIC members have provided data from surveys undertaken between May 2022 and April 2024. The extrapolation of this data indicates that as many as 4 million licensable asbestos items were found in these two years, and at current removal rates, this could take up to 100 years to deal with.

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[7] *Asbestos Testing and Consultancy Association (ATAC), and National Organisation of Asbestos Consultants (NORAC), 'Review of UK Asbestos Management 2022: The First Annual Data Analysis Report Into Asbestos in UK Buildings', 2023, https://www.atac.org.uk/news/first-annual-data-analysis-report-into-asbestos-in-uk-buildings-published/*

[8] *Department for Education. Condition of School Buildings Survey CDC1: Key Findings Report. UK Government, 2021, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/60af7cbbe90e071b54214c82/Condition_of_School_Buildings_Survey_CDC1_-_key_findings_report.pdf and NHS Digital. Estates Returns Information Collection: Summary Page and Dataset for ERIC 2021/22. NHS Digital, 2022, https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/estates-returns-information-collection/england-2021-22*

[9] *National Audit Office, Government Building Maintenance Backlog Is at Least £49 Billion, Spending Watchdog Says, 22 January 2025, https://www.nao.org.uk/press-releases/government-building-maintenance-backlog-is-at-least-49-billion-spending-watchdog-says/*

Both the challenges of Net Zero and the backlog maintenance within health and educational estates mean considerable expenditure will be necessary. Asbestos management is too often sidelined, not considered, or inadequately funded, leading to increased management costs and the societal costs already highlighted.

The Department for Work and Pension (DWP) Committee report recommended introducing a **40-year plan to remove all asbestos from UK premises.** Although Asbestos Information CIC supports this plan, a more targeted approach is needed, focusing on the highest-risk materials and premises with the most vulnerable occupants. A change in approach can only happen with improvements in data capture and the subsequent application of this data.

The experiment of managing asbestos has been ongoing for over twenty years since introducing the 'Duty to Manage' requirements. The 1999 ban on asbestos use is seen by many as meaning that asbestos is no longer present and does not pose a risk. The November 2022 report and the evidence submitted to the DWP Inquiry indicate that **the current asbestos management approach is not working**. As we decarbonise UK buildings, the concern is that the number of those affected by asbestos will continue to increase.

The introduction of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 was meant to safeguard everyone. Yet, up until 1999, successive governments continued to allow the use of asbestos. In no other area of UK health and safety have deaths risen to the level seen with asbestos over such a prolonged period. Consultants within the asbestos industry now feel **it is time to offer an alternative approach**.

WHAT DO THE FINDINGS SHOW?

Of the over **7 million** lines of data used in this report, **almost 3 million items of asbestos were identified**. The highest risk group, E-G, accounted for nearly **26%** of all identified asbestos. The data revealed that almost **30%** of these items suffered moderate or significant damage, suggesting that asbestos management was ineffective.

BUILDING A STRATEGY

While the asbestos consulting and removal sectors remain relatively small economically, no one can undertake a project in pre-2000 constructed properties without considering asbestos. Our approach recognises this, ensuring asbestos is controlled and does not increase the risk to building occupiers or those maintaining buildings.

Asbestos Information CIC has been reviewing survey data and producing a model for a national asbestos database. **This model has involved analysing data from nearly 400,000 properties containing almost 3 million asbestos items and over 7 million lines of data.** The Asbestos Information CIC is due to publish the findings of this extensive data analysis in an upcoming report.

Asbestos Information CIC outlines five necessary steps to build a national database and explains how these will contribute to an asbestos strategy.

1 IDENTIFY PROPERTIES

To build a central national database, it is necessary first to identify the premises where asbestos may be present. The first step would be to use postal addresses, but having a unique identifier where an address is unavailable is challenging. The Ordnance Survey has completed work on assigning UPRNs (Unique Property Reference Numbers) to all UK postal addresses. However, for sites with multiple buildings, only one UPRN may exist. In such cases, Ordnance Survey maps play a crucial role in identifying and updating the database.

Over the past six months, Asbestos Information CIC has reviewed this information and developed mechanisms for linking all surveys to Ordnance Survey UPRNs.

Incorporating Ordnance Survey data into the database would facilitate the identification of sites without asbestos records, providing a long-term solution for measuring and mapping compliance. We aim to collaborate with the Ordnance Survey to determine how age and property-type-related data can generate suitable lists and map gaps in occupancy and risk.

As part of the overall strategy, a standardised pick list of property types will be necessary, as current databases and surveying consultancies use varying methods for classification. This list will consider occupational risk and the vulnerability of occupants and users, enabling different strategic approaches for various property types.

2 RATIONALISE THE DATA

Asbestos surveys can be complex and lengthy documents. Producing a database with potentially millions of differently formatted documents presents many challenges.

Those tasked with managing asbestos in buildings often complain about the difficulty of understanding survey reports. For many, this does not help when trying to manage asbestos or develop an asbestos strategy. Duty-holders struggle to manage asbestos because reports are complex and inconsistent.

Using the models **Asbestos Information CIC** have developed so far, existing data can be used to produce a national database. As more asbestos surveys, re-inspections, and audits are undertaken, the data quality will improve, allowing for enhanced decision-making.

Current and future asbestos surveys will be enhanced if the surveying industry, HSE, and accreditation bodies agree on the data structure and terminology. This improvement is crucial for achieving greater data accuracy, which is necessary for creating a clearer **understanding of the UK's asbestos inventory and for developing a national strategy**.

DEVELOPMENT

During the parliamentary review of HSE's management of asbestos, it became apparent that no precise figures were available to quantify the extent of the asbestos issue in the UK.

The aforementioned November 2022 report, highlighted several issues with collecting and recording asbestos data. The report has encouraged further research and development exploring machine learning and artificial intelligence to improve asbestos data collection.

UKAS-accredited asbestos surveying and inspection organisations founded Asbestos Information CIC to explore how to develop a National Asbestos Register and a long-term asbestos strategy using their asbestos survey data.

Data was reviewed for two years, from **May 2022 to April 2024**, as part of the research. The data collected represents an estimated 20% of the accredited inspections undertaken during this period. The dataset contains nearly **400,000 properties** and has processed over **7 million data lines, identifying almost 3 million asbestos items**. This is the largest dataset of asbestos ever produced in the UK and potentially the world. Information on how this data has been processed and the technology and methodology used will be available on the AIC website.

The figures underscore the magnitude of the challenge in addressing asbestos and highlight the need for a solid foundation of knowledge for any decision-making or future strategy.

This dataset and a review of the current approach have led to the proposal to introduce the 'Asbestos Information Certificate'.

Extrapolating from this data suggests that **up to 15 million** asbestos items may have been identified over two years by UKAS-accredited asbestos companies, representing only a limited percentage of organisations undertaking asbestos inspections.

It is impossible to determine the number of asbestos items that may have been identified over the past two years, as there is no central register of those conducting asbestos surveys. However, the number of unaccredited organisations performing these surveys is significantly higher than those that are accredited. This is despite the HSE strongly recommending the use of accredited surveyors.

3 PRESENT THE DATA

The Asbestos Information Certificate

Asbestos survey reports are often considered complex documents with inconsistent terminology and numerous numbers. Understanding what all this means is difficult for those managing properties and does not lend itself to building a national database or developing a strategy.

We are proposing the implementation of the Asbestos Information Certificate (AIC) using the format of an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) and a Display Energy Certificate (DEC). An AIC will provide an overview of the asbestos condition and the effectiveness of management. The aim is that these certificates will give a clear and concise analysis of each site, forming the basis of the UK's National Asbestos Register.

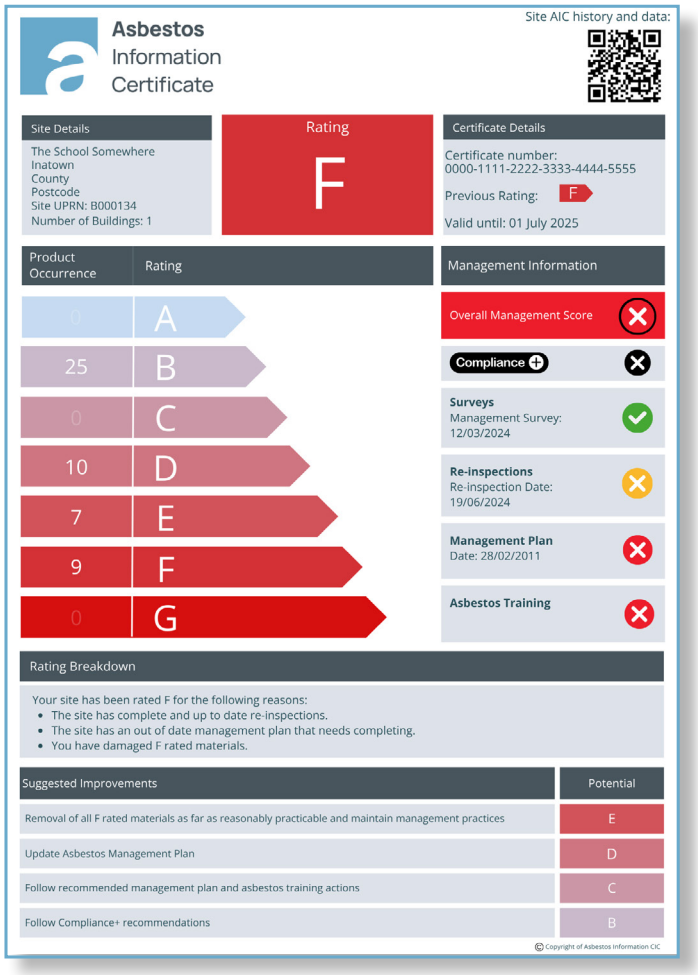

Figure 3 - An example Asbestos Information Certificate

With artificial intelligence algorithms and industry experience, it has been possible to produce a list of asbestos items, assess their risk and provide a weighting based on the material's location or property type and risk to occupants.

> ***The material's risk is assessed based on its present environment—for example, a primary school—and further refined based on its location within the building (e.g., a classroom versus a boiler room). For instance, an asbestos insulation board in a warm air heater presents a significantly higher risk than the same material used as a window infill panel.***

This process has been drafted, and input from user groups, trade unions, and others will assist in finalising this model. This approach and a common vocabulary would be cost-neutral for those undertaking asbestos surveys.

QR codes on the AIC can provide direct access to survey data.

AIC certificates will be displayed on the premises and held in a central register, from which decisions about removal plans and strategies can be made.

Figure 4 - For a detailed explanation of the Asbestos Information Certificate, scan the QR code to watch our AIC Explanation Video.

Data Findings

The large-scale analysis of asbestos survey data has rarely been undertaken due to the complexity of reports and inconsistencies in terminology. The November 2022 report highlighted some of these challenges, prompting members of the Asbestos Information CIC to develop models for more effective data evaluation.

This approach has been fundamental to the recommendations in this report. Artificial intelligence, machine learning and natural language processing have enabled data integration from multiple sources, allowing more effective analysis and interpretation. As a result, we can provide a snapshot of the UK's historical and current asbestos management.

It is important to note that the certificate is not intended to replace the asbestos survey report.

Instead, it provides a consistent summary of the survey findings that can be uploaded to a central database to support reporting and strategic decision-making.

This means that existing core data can remain in a variety of systems currently used by duty holders with the AIC only using summarised data, overcoming security and confidentiality issues.

The number of asbestos-related fatalities in the UK remains nearly three times higher than those caused by road accidents. Asbestos-related deaths have plateaued in recent years due to historic regulatory changes and the ban on asbestos use. The HSE publishes data on mesothelioma deaths, and by mapping this alongside road accident fatality figures, Asbestos Information CIC has created a visual map of the relative risk of death from asbestos exposure compared to road accidents in the UK. Simply put, the darker the shade of red, the higher the risk of death from mesothelioma compared to a traffic accident.

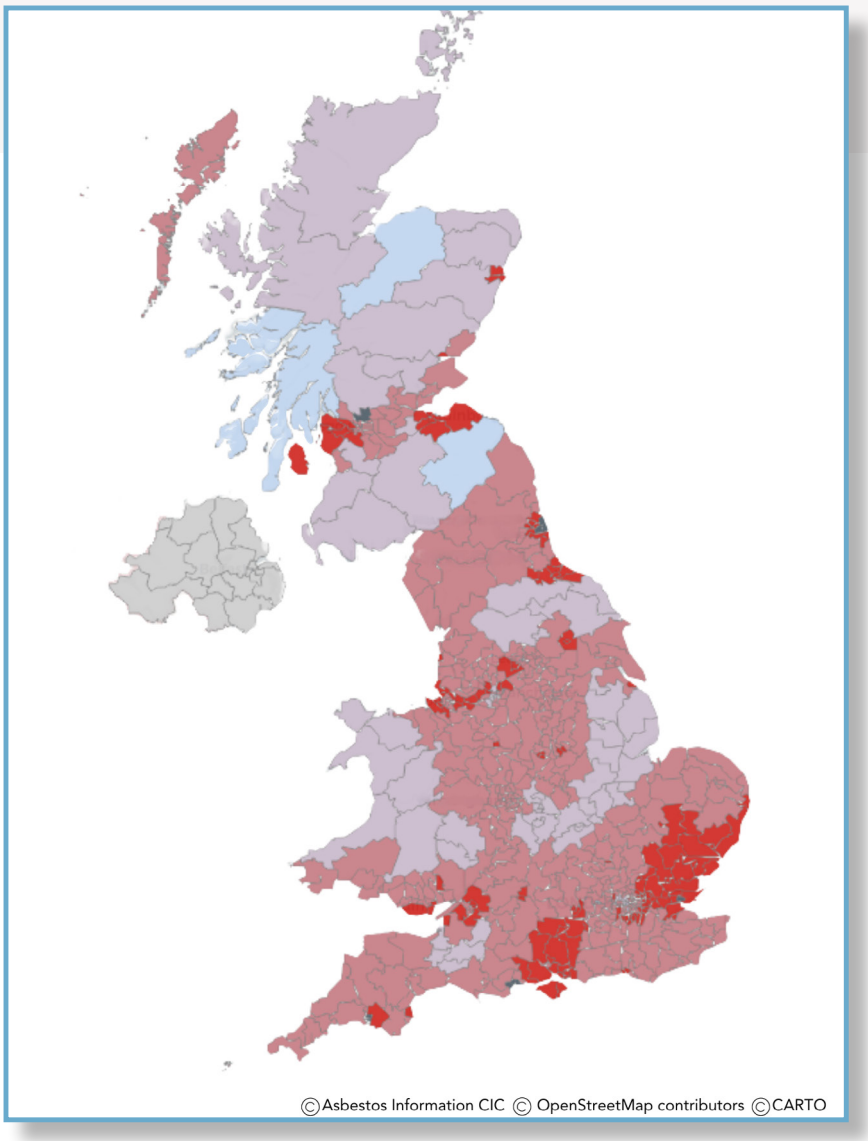

Figure 5 - Map of the UK, split by parliamentary constituency, showing the relative risk of death from mesothelioma and asbestos cancer compared to a road traffic accident.

Map Key

- Mesothelioma deaths exceed traffic deaths by more than 4 times
- Mesothelioma deaths are 2 to 4 times greater than road accident deaths
- Mesothelioma deaths are 1 to 2 times greater than road accident deaths
- Mesothelioma and asbestos cancer deaths combined would exceed road accident deaths
- Mesothelioma and asbestos cancer deaths are lower than or equal to road accident deaths
- No comparable data available for this area

Scan the QR code to interact with the map

The map enables users to examine the relative risks of asbestos exposure and road accidents across the UK's parliamentary constituencies. It provides access to the limited data on the presence of asbestos within a constituency and the condition of these asbestos-containing materials.

This modelling is not perfect. We have adjusted road accident death figures to reflect the **17% reduction in road deaths due to COVID-19 lockdowns in 2020 and 12% in 2021.**[10] The map demonstrates how asbestos data can be compared with other geographically available data to identify trends. In the future, it may be possible to map incidences of mesothelioma against high levels of asbestos in premises. Asbestos data is mapped by postcode into parliamentary constituencies to prevent being able to identify individual properties. Where more than one constituency falls within a reporting district for mesothelioma deaths, the mesothelioma figures in the map's click-through feature are recorded for both constituencies.

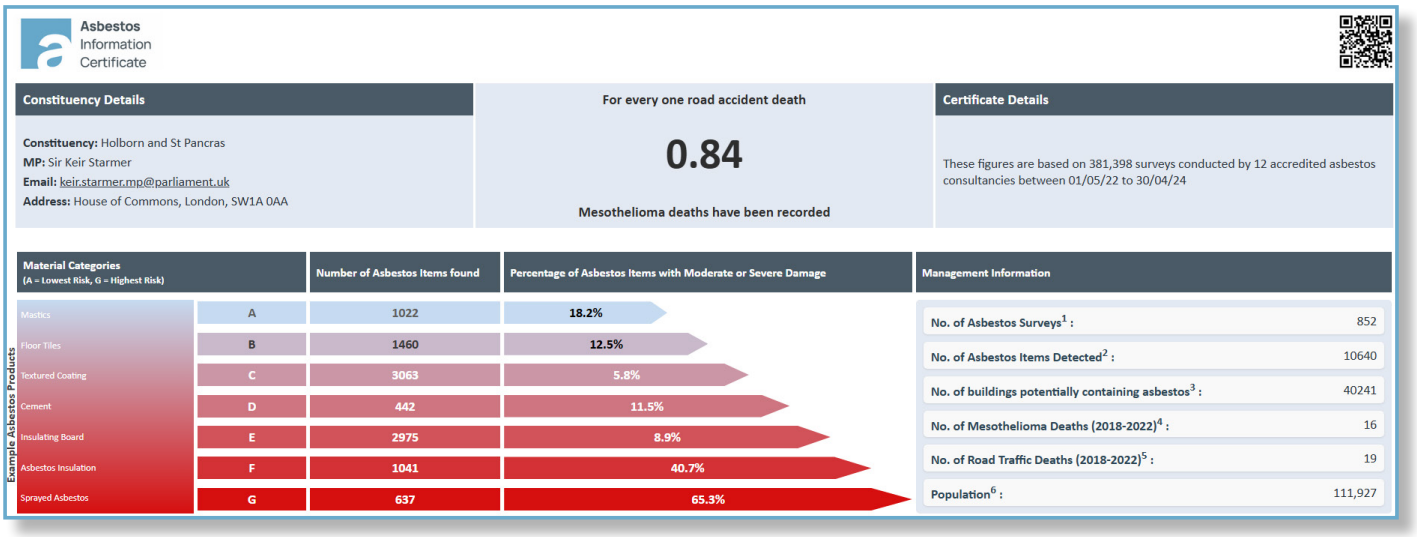

Figure 6 - A version of the Asbestos Information Certificate for a constituency showing the asbestos items found, collected from existing survey data.

Data has been collected from 381,398 premises. These include all types of public and commercial properties, the common areas of blocks of flats, and dwellings controlled by local authorities and housing associations. Over 2.5 million confirmed asbestos items have been analysed.

The data was sourced from UKAS-accredited asbestos inspection companies and spans May 2022 to April 2024. This dataset represents approximately 20% of the surveys conducted across the UK during this period. Asbestos Information CIC will publish documentation detailing the methodologies used for material classification and details on the progress of building a national website, for which we are calling on the government to assist the industry in developing.

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[10] *Department for Transport, The impact of lockdown on reported road casualties: Great Britain, final results 2020, GOV.UK, 2021, https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/reported-road-casualties-great-britain-annual-report-2020/the-impact-of-lockdown-on-reported-road-casualties-great-britain-final-results-2020#:~:text=Reductions%20in%20overall%20casualties%20followed,average%20for%202017%20to%202019*

Asbestos products have been categorised into seven groups, ranging from A to G. Materials classified as A present the lowest risk. They are typically well-bonded materials with the lowest asbestos content. G-rated materials pose the highest risk and are asbestos-containing materials, where asbestos fibre release can occur easily.

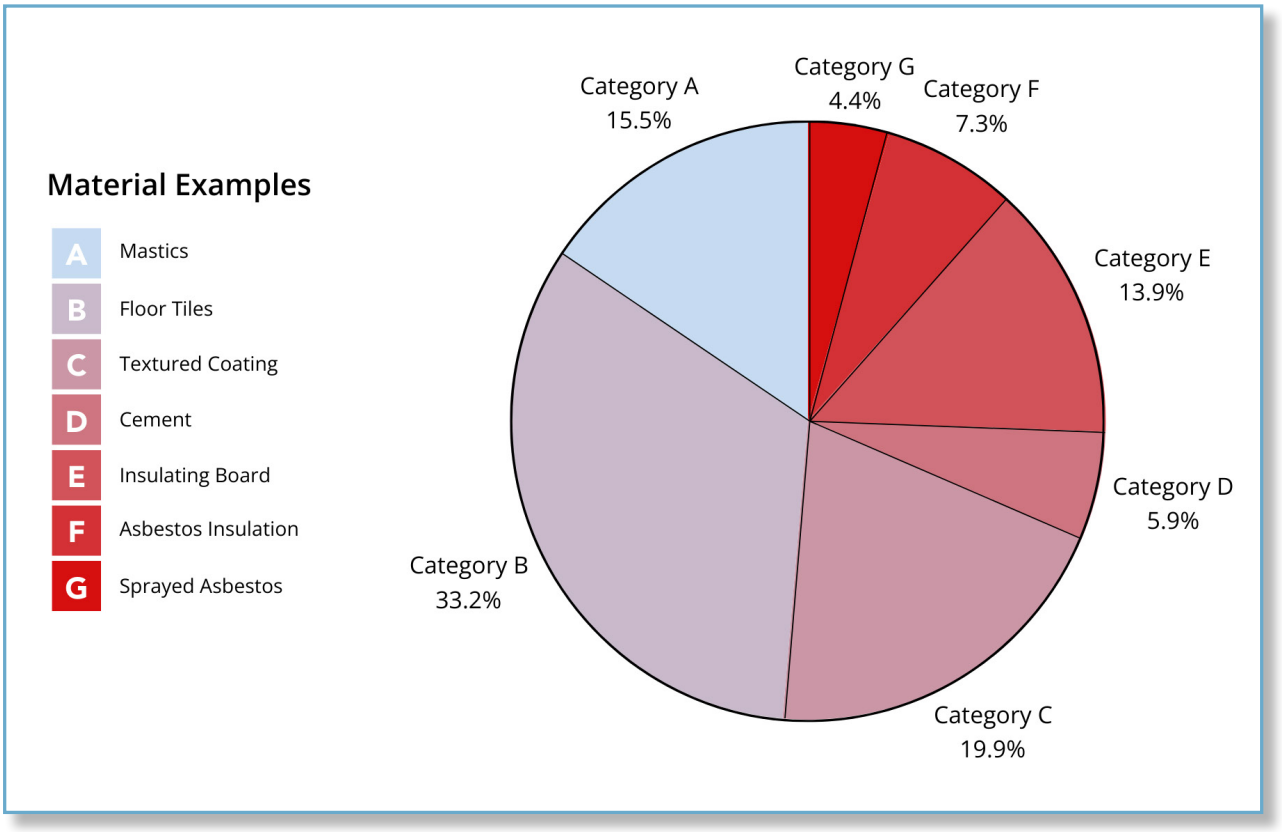

Figure 7 - Pie chart showing the proportion of asbestos materials identified between May 2022 and April 2024, classified by the Asbestos Information CIC's A to G ranking.

In broad terms, around 33% of these items would be classified as licensable for asbestos removal purposes, equating to **800,000 items**. If the dataset represents 20% of the total number of expected survey reports in the two years, this would suggest that **up to 4 million items of licensed asbestos were identified in the two-year data period**.

It is important to note that this data can only be applied to UKAS-accredited organisations, as they are identifiable. **Accreditation for undertaking surveys is not mandatory**, and tracking organisations offering non-accredited surveys is impossible. By mandating accreditation for those conducting asbestos surveys, we can not only improve quality but enable the identification of these organisations in future data-driven exercises.

Current guidance on asbestos management focuses on maintaining asbestos in good condition, helping prevent fibre release. This approach must be considered in the context of the condition of the public estate. Asbestos currently does not feature in the cost condition assessments for public buildings, yet the National Audit Office has identified a £50 billion backlog in maintenance within the public estate.[11] Against this backlog, asbestos is expected to be maintained in good condition.

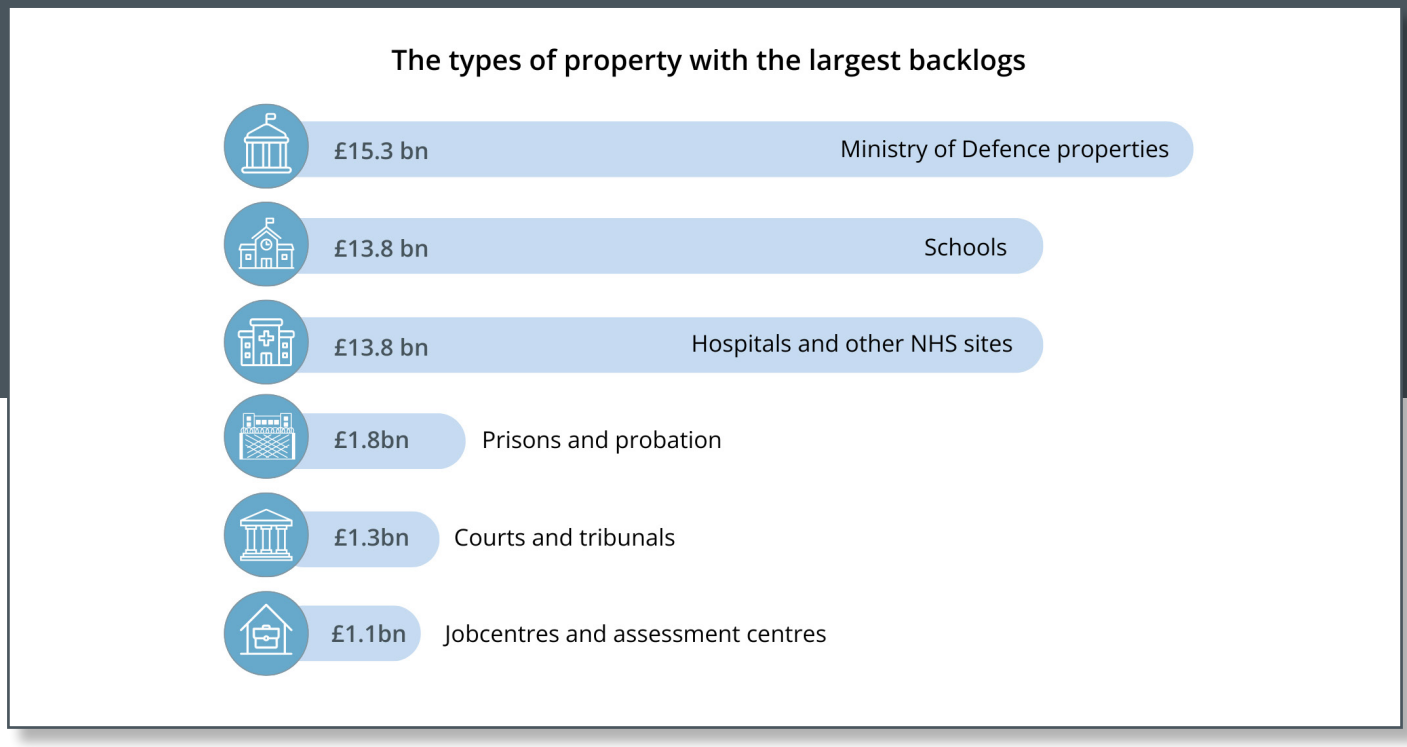

Figure 8 - Breakdown of the maintenance backlog costs in the UK, split by property type[11]

The above table clearly illustrates where the Government's maintenance backlog can be found, but alarmingly, the second highest element of the backlog is found in schools that are occupied by those who are at most significant long term risk from asbestos exposure.

It has been reported that the pre-Covid, around 30,000 notifications were submitted per annum to undertake licensed asbestos work. Since the exit from Covid restrictions, the number of notifications for licensed asbestos work has fallen by roughly a third to 20,000 per annum, **suggesting that asbestos removal works may form part of the backlog in maintenance**.[12]

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[11] *National Audit Office, Maintaining Public Service Facilities, 22 January 2025, https://www.nao.org.uk/reports/maintaining-public-service-facilities/?nab=1*

[12] *As reported at Asbestos Network meetings.*

4 IMPLEMENT THE AIC

Testing and Review

Given that younger individuals are at higher risk of developing asbestos-related diseases, the initial focus should be on locations frequented by the youngest, starting with schools.[13] The proposal is to begin in a few selected regions, where asbestos data from schools will be reviewed and converted into the AIC format. This review will be undertaken only by approved organisations and personnel. This methodology will provide the first opportunity to test the artificial intelligence, machine learning and natural language processing tools developed to produce the AIC's. Once finalised, the approach should roll out to all schools and premises used by young people.

Asbestos Information CIC will review the outcome and, where necessary, amend the assessment methodology and the developed tools. During this period, work would also be undertaken to integrate data from the Ordnance Survey into the systems.

Implementation

Following pilot work, historical asbestos data from schools will be reviewed, added to the database, and flagged for review during the next annual re-inspection. Data from UK schools will then be thoroughly assessed, allowing for revised AIC's and a strategic review of asbestos risk management in schools. Asbestos products will be classified based on risk, location, and condition, with national-level input from the government, school leaders, trade unions, and industry experts.

This data will help identify sites containing the highest-risk materials, allowing work to be prioritised and a national remediation strategy to be developed. The data will guide funding allocation and assess the cost impact of asbestos on Net Zero projects within the education sector.

Once completed, a national strategy for asbestos removal in schools can be developed, similar to the government's plan for Energy Performance Certificates, which focuses on buildings rated F and G.

While costs are challenging to estimate due to varying data quality, Asbestos Information CIC projects that forming and populating the database for schools, along with issuing AIC's, could be completed for between £15 and £23 million, similar to the cost of school condition audits.

[13] *UK Health and Safety Executive. Relative Vulnerability of Children to Asbestos Compared to Adults. UK Government, 25 Feb. 2019, www.gov.uk/government/publications/relative-vulnerability-of-children-to-asbestos-compared-to-adults*

Beyond Education Properties

After analysing the lessons learned, the exercise undertaken within the education sector can be repeated in the health sector.

An AIC will be issued with every accredited asbestos survey to ensure that others benefit from this approach. This will provide those managing and acquiring properties with clear guidance on the asbestos risk present on a site whilst aiding legal practitioners when advising clients. This approach will significantly reduce the costs associated with asbestos management while providing better protection to property users.

Data capture will need to be amended, but this can be implemented easily and at minimal additional cost. Ultimately, the risks associated with asbestos will be clearly defined, leading to potential savings for property owners, managers, and society.

5 PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE WITH A REMOVAL STRATEGY

Since the 1999 asbestos ban, many surveys have been conducted, but duty holders often fail to act on or update them. We propose incorporating an **Asbestos Information Certificate (AIC)** in all pre-2000 property transactions rather than requiring another survey of known asbestos-containing premises. This approach ensures buyers understand the risks and necessary actions clearly and concisely.

An AIC will encourage proactive property owners to address asbestos, but others may still neglect it. The data collected from AIC's will be crucial in developing a national strategy beyond public buildings.

AIC's should become mandatory for social housing due to increasing regulatory failures and growing concerns about the quality of accommodation.

This approach mirrors that of Energy Performance Certificates, and given the 2028 ban on letting properties rated below band C, a similar standard should apply to asbestos.

Further protection measures are needed. Asbestos remains widespread in UK buildings, yet its extent and condition are largely unknown. **The HSE's regulatory scope is too limited.**

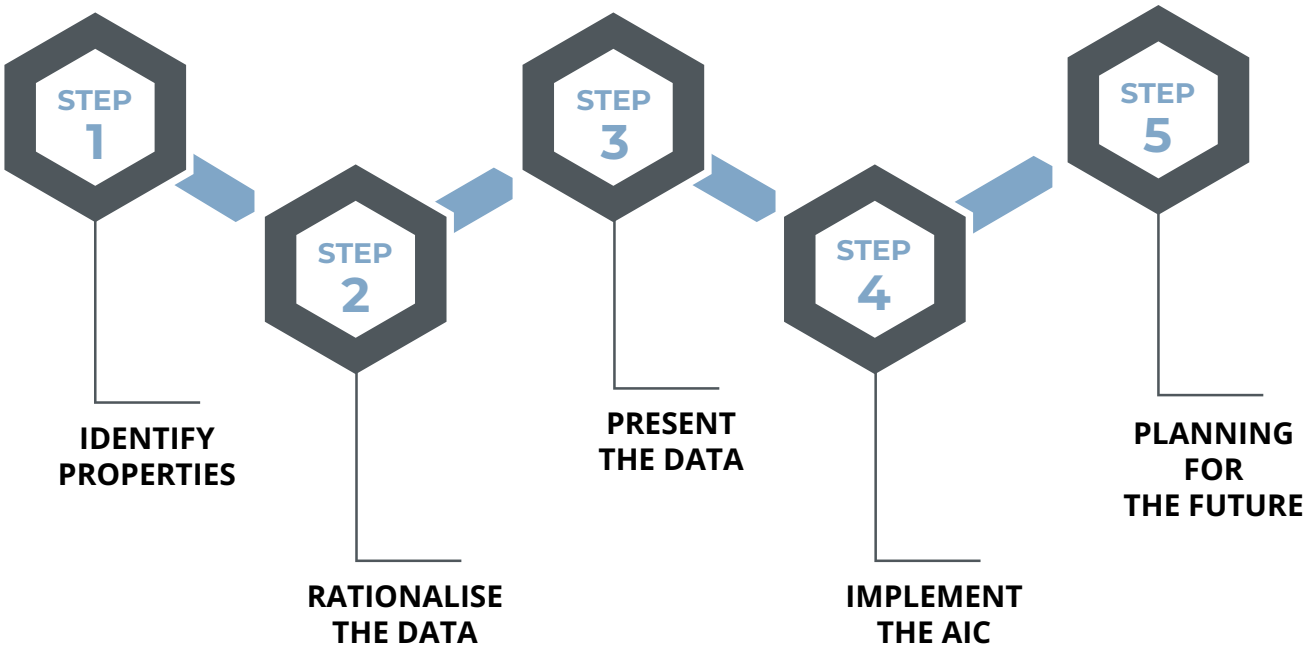
We are calling for a review of UK construction and property management processes, particularly building refurbishment.

For example, Local Authority Building Control (LABC) could play a more significant role by requiring asbestos surveys for planning applications. We believe this cost would be less than the £24 million recently allocated to LABC for fire risk assessments.

We know that the earlier you are initially exposed to asbestos, the greater the lifetime risk of developing an asbestos-related disease. Given this, our focus should be on eliminating asbestos exposure among the youngest and most vulnerable in society. This would mean focusing removal efforts on **schools** with highest risk asbestos items as identified from the AIC. With the follow up approach systematically identifiying vulnerability and risk.

SUMMARY

STEPS TO ACHIEVING A NATIONAL ASBESTOS STRATEGY



An alternative approach to asbestos management is long overdue. In response to significant shortcomings highlighted by the November 2022 industry report and the Work and Pension Committee, Asbestos Information CIC advocates a five-phased programme. This approach focuses on preventative measures, including developing an Asbestos Information Certificate (AIC), similar to Energy Performance Certificates, to classify asbestos risk and establish a national database.

Assessing and addressing the UK's high asbestos presence is also critical as part of the broader agenda for Net Zero and infrastructure maintenance. There are serious issues with the current 'leave and manage' strategy concerning cases of poorly maintained asbestos regularly found. Data research has highlighted these issues further, particularly the need for improved data collection. A targeted asbestos removal plan is necessary, particularly in buildings with the most vulnerable occupants.

By adopting a risk-based approach, the AIC prioritises public health to help eliminate asbestos exposure. Expanding this approach to sectors beyond education will provide a clearer pathway for more effective asbestos management in the UK.

The proposed AIC will streamline asbestos data, inform national removal strategies, and aid compliance tracking through a central database. Testing and implementing the AIC across the education sector will enable an overall picture of the state of asbestos in a relatively short period. Critically, improvement cannot be seen without strengthening regulatory frameworks and quality standards, especially mandatory accreditation for completing asbestos surveys.

Get in touch with Asbestos Information CIC to discover how our work is paving the way for a more transparent and united approach towards reducing asbestos risk in UK commercial and domestic properties.

ISBN: 978-1-0369-1547-6