

Press Release 9th March 2015: JUAC takes Government to task over failure to publish the findings of its asbestos review.

Government assurances that the long-delayed findings of its schools asbestos review would be published early in 2015 now appear meaningless. The Joint Union Asbestos Committee (JUAC) seriously questions the Government's intentions to publish before the pre-election 'purdah' period begins on 30 March. Failure to publish would mean that the Government is admitting that this is an issue too big to tackle.

Ministers are clearly worried about how the report will impact on the election campaign – but this is too important an issue to be brushed aside and left for a future Government to sort out. School staff and parents will understandably be sceptical about Government motives in the run up to the election.

There has been more than ample time for the Government to consider its response and set out the steps it considers necessary to address the barriers to safe and effective management of asbestos in schools. During the 9 month period since the Review should have been published, in June 2014, inevitably some staff and children will have been needlessly exposed to asbestos fibres, putting them at risk of the development of asbestos-related disease in adult life.

22 teachers died of mesothelioma in 2012. Teacher deaths are the tip of the iceberg since inevitably there will be children who will die in later life because of asbestos exposure during their school days. We cannot be sure how many school cooks, cleaners and caretakers have died since their deaths are not classified according to their employment.

Chair of JUAC, Julie Winn, said: 'The Government must stop prevaricating, admit there's a serious problem with asbestos in schools and use the findings of the Review to work with the teacher and support staff unions, and other interested parties, to develop a sensible long term strategy for the management of asbestos in schools. JUAC will continue to push the Government to honour its responsibility to ensure that adults and children are not harmed by asbestos in schools.'

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*JUAC is a trade union campaigning committee comprising the six main education unions: Association of School and College Leaders; Association of Teachers and Lecturers; National Association of Head Teachers; NASUWT; National Union of Teachers; Voice; plus the education sections of Unite, UNISON, UCATT and the GMB: www.juac.org.uk. The Group has the objective of making all UK schools and colleges safe from the dangers of asbestos. All the unions in JUAC are members of the Asbestos in Schools (AIS) campaign.