# **Part 1: Asbestos in schools.**

I’m sure your main concern is about asbestos in schools, initial concern was focused on the asbestos contained in school roofs but more recently there have been concerns when tradesmen have worked on walls containing asbestos or even where asbestos has been found in school grounds.

When I am asked to assess the situation where asbestos has been found I have two monitoring techniques available. Initially we can collect dust, we’ll take wipe samples from horizontal surfaces and send that to the laboratory to determine whether asbestos is present. It will detect the presence of asbestos but doesn’t necessarily indicate exposure.

When we need to assess exposure then we need to do air sampling, the air sampling technique looks for respirable particles which are those that are small enough to be breathed in and indicates potential exposure. In situations to date where asbestos has been found in schools, air sampling which has been undertaken has uniformly shown results of less than <0.01 fibres per ml which is one tenth of the allowable level and at the limit of detection.

What I conclude is the normal weathering process does not appear to produce particles which are small enough to be breathed in.

Our experience is reflected in overseas studies, one very very large study which collected almost four thousand samples from seven hundred and fifty-two buildings showed that the average concentration of all airborne asbestos in structures was 0.01 fibres per ml and that the average concentration of airborne asbestos in long fibres which are known to be more harmful was 0.00012 fibres per ml.

In this study for all samples 99.9 percent of the samples were <0.01 fibres for longer fibres. What this tells us is that even when air asbestos is present in buildings, unless it’s been disturbed or something has happened its unlikely to cause harm.

To summarize the hazard from asbestos shouldn’t be minimised or trivialised its capable of causing serious disease. However, the evidence suggests that any hazard from undisturbed asbestos to students and staff is minimal. Where an episode of incidental exposure has occurred, for example if someone has drilled in a wall any increase in the lifetime risk is so small as to be almost incalculable.

While asbestos remains present it may be disturbed with the potential for exposure and that’s the reason why it all needs to be removed. However, removal must be done with all necessary precautions.

Presentation Ended.