

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/foi/internalops/og/og-00002.pdf>

In December 2022, HSE published new internal guidance relating to the provision of welfare facilities on UK construction sites, but how does this affect asbestos removal works?

Throughout the construction industry it's not uncommon to see workers provided with poor or even no welfare facilities, this cannot be allowed to happen. HSE recognises that there have been some issues over interpretation of The Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2015, known simply as CDM, throughout the construction industry, including amongst asbestos contractors.

Having worked in the asbestos industry and been a supervisory licence holder back in the day, I remember all too well how the asbestos removal phase was often not considered as part of the proper construction phase and so the main welfare often was not present when the removal was taking place. This has improved in recent years but there is still a way to go to ensure that enabling works such as asbestos removal is considered as part of the overall package and that asbestos workers are afforded the same facilities as the main construction teams.

HSE has produced a detailed operational guidance document which, while primarily aimed at HSE's construction inspectors and visiting officers, has also been shared with industry so there can be no doubt about the legal requirements and standards of welfare HSE expects to see on all construction sites.

We expect that by sharing these clearer standards, the asbestos industry will find it easier to understand what is required of them and will raise their own standards to provide a better and healthier workplace for their staff. We will also expect clients to have a better understanding of what is required so they can play their part in the provision of adequate welfare for all site workers and visitors throughout all phases of the work.

HSE will of course use the guidance to enforce on contractors who continue to fall below the established standards. Responsible contractors should not be concerned though, in reality very little has changed within the requirements of CDM but this guidance clarifies the standards and makes it easier to comply.

We will expect to see asbestos contractors applying the new guidance to their planning of works to ensure that their operatives and site teams have good quality, accessible and reliable welfare on every site. When writing the plan of works, it is very easy to become solely focused on the asbestos removal or remediation phase of the works and to not pay as much attention to the other requirements of planning and running a safe, healthy and compliant site. Welfare should be considered and detailed in the written plan of works so that site teams know what to expect. HSE are working with the trade bodies for the industry to ensure that welfare forms a key part of the auditing process too.

There are many benefits to good welfare, the primary benefit being control over health risks but it also acts as a barometer for the entire business. A contractor who supplies good welfare is often seen to be achieving good standards throughout the enterprise. The opposite is also true, experience shows that contractors who do not address a basic need such as welfare often have unacceptable standards elsewhere. Clients will undoubtedly see that good contractors providing decent welfare are the contractors they prefer for their works.

The time has come for the asbestos, and wider construction industry to lead the way in providing a good quality working environment for their employees and good welfare forms the core of this.

*Matt Greenly*  
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