

Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC)

Previous health and safety updates have highlighted the issues around RAAC. The current situation is that in England, all schools with confirmed RAAC must take affected areas out of use until effective mitigations have been put in place. In Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, surveys are being carried out, but schools are generally remaining open.

NASUWT is aware of issues where schools have been forced to close areas and relocate pupils to other venues. The Union is continuing to raise issues with the Department for Education (DfE) in England around this, and also continues to press the governments in the Devolved Nations to ensure that appropriate steps are taken.

NASUWT Health and Safety Representatives should continue to press school leaders/employers to ensure that schools are surveyed to identify any RAAC and that appropriate steps are taken to ensure the safety of occupants.

Time off for health and safety duties

NASUWT Health and Safety Representatives and other activists undertaking the functions of a Health and Safety Representative must be given **paid time as is necessary, during working hours, to perform their functions**. This is specified in regulation 4(2) of the Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations 1977, which applies in Great Britain, and the Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1979. The functions of a Health and Safety Representative are also specified in regulation 4(1).

Please note that this is different from the **reasonable** time off with pay provided to Workplace Representatives carrying out trade union duties under different legislation.

Activists in receipt of facility time should not be required to use facility time to undertake Health and Safety Representative functions; separate time off as necessary should be provided.

Health and Safety Representatives must also be given paid time off for undergoing such training in aspects of those functions as may be reasonable in all the circumstances.

Any Health and Safety Representatives who experience difficulties in accessing time off should speak to their Local Association Secretary or National Executive Member for further advice.

Radon

Issues with radon were highlighted in the autumn 2022 health and safety update (available at www.nasuwt.org.uk/HealthAndSafety). Since this update, a private boarding school in Bath has been fined £50,000 after it was discovered that pupils and staff had been exposed to high levels of radon, the naturally occurring radioactive gas which can lead to lung cancer.

An investigation from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) revealed that Kingswood School was aware they had an issue with radon in some of their buildings in 2007. However, between 2010 and 2018, the school carried out no further monitoring or checks on the control measures introduced to reduce concentrations of the gas.

This underlines the importance of schools taking the issues around radon seriously, and if a school is within a radon-affected area (see <https://www.ukradon.org/information/ukmaps>), Health and Safety Representatives should press school leaders/employers to ensure that the required monitoring and/or remediation work is undertaken.

HSE Asbestos Inspections

The HSE has announced it will be carrying out a further round of inspections of educational settings in Great Britain, to check levels of compliance with the Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012. This follows a similar programme in the 2022/23 academic year which found that one third of schools visited had some form of breach of the regulations, with 7% requiring formal enforcement action.

Health and Safety Representatives should ensure that school leaders/employers are aware of the HSE's inspection programme and that they have processes in place to ensure full compliance with the regulations. Health and Safety Representatives are also entitled to consult with HSE inspectors visiting any sites.

Mental Health Policies

Acas has published new guidance for employers around supporting mental health at work. This includes guidance around having a mental health policy, as well as the importance of working with trade unions in developing a mental health policy.

The guidance can be found at: <https://www.acas.org.uk/supporting-mental-health-workplace/having-a-policy>. The guidance also details what employers should be doing to support the mental health of their employees.

Health and Safety Representatives should bring this to the attention of school leaders/employers and urge them to produce/review their mental health policy.

NASUWT also has a mental health and work-related stress toolkit, which is available at: www.nasuwt.org.uk/MentalHealthToolkit.



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