

Reducing the risk of asbestos at BACS

About BACS Ltd

BACS Limited, the UK's automated clearing house (ACH), is a not-for-profit organisation, owned by the UK's banks and building societies. It processes Direct Debits, Direct Credits, standing order, telephone, and some but not all Internet payments on behalf of these organisations. In 2003 BACS is expected to process almost four billion payments.

More than 75% of consumers use Direct Debit to pay regular bills. Over 40,000 companies are currently registered as customers of the BACS service, including all of the FTSE 100, while a further 60,000 businesses are indirect submitters to BACS through commercial bureaux.

In February 2002 BACS launched its NewBACS technology renewal programme in order to meet the rapidly growing demand for its electronic payment services. This is an important investment in cutting edge technology and is winning the company major industry awards.

Managing Asbestos

BACS like many companies in the UK has a number of premises and has recently re-assessed its property strategy in line with its NewBACS programme. Currently its property portfolio includes the following:

Head Office and former main data processing centre.

A former aircraft factory this was converted into a computer centre with associated engineering and office accommodation in the 1970s. In order to support BACS Limited's continuous growth extensive alterations were carried out to the building from this period. Covering an area of 18,500 square metres elements of the building after conversion included some asbestos containing materials such as asbestos insulation boards as well as board or packing materials used as fire protection in certain isolated parts of the building.

Standby data processing centre.

A building converted into a standby computer centre in the early 80.s covering an area of 7,800 square metres. Minor amounts of asbestos containing materials were discovered in external panels from the original developers building. Currently under re-development.

Data processing centre.

An area converted into a data processing centre in 2002 covering an area of 2,400 square metres. It is sited within another organisation's high security building of 1930's vintage. This building had some asbestos containing materials.

Proposed New Head Office.

Under development is the fit out of a 90's multi-storey office development into a prestigious new head office building.

Developing the Asbestos Management System

BACS takes the management of risks very seriously. It must do to provide a safe and secure service to its staff and customers. This includes health and safety. An overall systematic approach has been adopted to health and safety within BACS in line with the HSE guidance in the area Successful Health and Safety Management (HSG 65). In terms of the asbestos management system used within BACS Limited, this has evolved with experience and expertise. Experience includes investing in and developing an appropriate system as well as suitable in-house resources to maintain that system. Where a health and safety issue may require specialised technical support or independent advice BACS will look to supplement the in-house experience with expertise in harmony with its health and safety culture and high standards.

Important principles in the BACS health and safety system are ownership and integration. Ownership means that where issues are localised to certain departments or job functions that the maintenance and operation of the system is part of the job of that department or individual. Integration means involving all the key players in that aspect and not restricting this to the in-house safety professional or outside expert. They still have their part to play as extending or supplementing the experience of the production team with expertise.

Mark Chamberlain, who is in charge of the Environment function covering premises issues, explains how this works:

“We have found the most effective way in which to manage the issues that asbestos in the building brings with them is to make people aware that its there and that we have a strict safety policy in place.

We have labelled all the areas that contain asbestos (this includes doors that have asbestos cores); this ensures that everyone, locksmiths, painter & decorators etc are aware of its presence.

Our asbestos registers are on our company intranet; these are updated yearly after Adams Environmental Ltd, our asbestos consultants carry out a condition inspection. We ensure that within our health & safety briefings all persons employed within a contract are made aware prior to any work being carried that the building contains asbestos and

where it is.”



Mark Chaimberlain

The Asbestos Management System in practice

The Asbestos Management System has been built up with the expertise of our asbestos consultants. We have forged an excellent working relationship over a period of nearly ten years. During this time they have advised us and helped us develop the system and where needed have carried out surveying, testing and communication of the results.

The Asbestos Register

This is held on the company intranet and is accessible to all who need the information. A spreadsheet format has been adopted and this is backed up with digital photos of the actual location. The register is updated on a regular basis by the analysts and the condition of the asbestos noted.

Staff Training

All staff that may have an involvement with asbestos within the premises receive a training session. This group includes not only engineering and premises maintenance staff but also contractors, IT installation staff and those who may have a need to install pipes, cables etc. The training session is built around the HSE Video .How Are You Today?. and is in two parts. Part one covers:

- types of asbestos
- uses
- law relating to asbestos
- medical effects

The first part of the video is then shown followed by a discussion. Part two covers:

- asbestos risk management
- testing

- treatment of asbestos; labeling, encapsulation, removal etc
- maintenance; risk assessment, inspection, asbestos register, training etc.
- projects.

The second half of the video is then shown which acts as a summary of the issues raised.

Any questions and issues are then dealt with.

The intention is to make the training as real as possible so for example real events are used to illustrate learning points and the attendees get to examine sealed samples of asbestos provided by the Asbestos Removal Contractors Association They also offered advice on the course content.

In addition to general training as part of our Investors in People process we encourage those who require more detailed knowledge to attend external courses and receive specialist information such as Croner.s Asbestos Risk Management.

Project Planning

Prior to projects taking place, in particular refurbishment projects the asbestos register is examined to see if any asbestos is likely to be encountered. Where there may be doubt a full Type 3 invasive survey will be undertaken as part of the enabling works. Removal will usually follow as part of the enabling works so that asbestos issues do not affect the health and safety of the workers nor project programme.

Risk Assessment

Risk assessments for work activities include asbestos issues. In general by tightly controlling the asbestos risk management issues the additional risk to other work activities such as maintenance work is reduced.

Risk Control

As an outcome of the risk assessment process a series of risk controls are used. The guiding principle is that no BACS staff or contractors are to work on asbestos or come into exposure to it. BACS policy is therefore that any work on asbestos is carried out by licensed contractors and so this is built into procedures for maintenance and project work including project plans. Other measures include:

- labelling of all asbestos materials
- information such as the asbestos register and training
- supervision of contractors including use of outside experts to provide support
- external audits of our procedures.

The main approach to risk control is to transfer the risk to specialist contractors. Also by staff training and integrating health and safety into job roles to tighten controls on the people managing the risk.

Staff Information and Protection

The most important aspect is that the asbestos in the building is small and contained in areas which do not have any contact with the majority of office staff. It is confined to maintenance areas of the building and BACS adopts a policy of informing all visitors and contractors about the location and the safety procedures we have in place. By working with its independent asbestos consultants specific measures have been taken such as:

- carry out separate staff testing when a landlord carried out asbestos removal works over a weekend in unoccupied premises.
- undertook boundary testing when adjacent buildings thought to contain asbestos containing materials was removed
- ensure that an independent asbestos survey was carried out of a building not reported to contain asbestos containing materials.

Continual Improvement

At BACS we are always seeking to improve our safety procedures in line with good practice. Our close working relationship our asbestos consultants and the National Safety Council as external auditors is a way of bringing outside knowledge and expertise to the process.

John Kersey
Company Health and Safety Officer