

Asbestos News 2019



On 24 November, we mark the 20-year anniversary of the total ban on the use of asbestos in the United Kingdom. While on paper the ban brought a century of asbestos use to an end, the reality is asbestos continues to have a devastating impact on the lives of families across the UK to this day.

As we reflect on the tens of thousands of people who have lost their lives to an asbestos-related disease since the ban came into force, we are more motivated than ever to shining the light on those employers and insurers who try to consign their record of putting people at risk to the history books. You can read more about our #PastButPresent campaign and how we're working to bring those responsible to book on our website.

In this edition of Asbestos News, we meet Sandra Kellett, who shares her story of being unknowingly exposed to asbestos as a trainee nurse. She was diagnosed with mesothelioma just over two years ago. You can also find out more information about how we're supporting the Fire Brigade Union's (FBU) calls to protect firefighters from the dangers of exposure to toxic substances.

“Thompsons Solicitors were invaluable in getting me the support I needed and taking my case”

Sandra Kellett

Thompsons Solicitors' asbestos client, pictured above as a trainee nurse.

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Sandra's story

Sandra Kellett, 62, was working as a trainee nurse when she was unknowingly exposed to asbestos on a hospital ward that was undergoing refurbishment.

More than four decades later, in September 2017, she was diagnosed with right pleural mesothelioma - an asbestos-related cancer that affects the lining of the lungs.



Sandra Kellett, pictured right.

"We came out of the hospital, my husband and I, and never spoke. We got in the car and we both just cried," she said. "I kept thinking, 'I'm not going to see my daughter get married, I'm not going to see my granddaughter grow up, I'm not going to see her go to school or to her first nativity play'. All stupid things were going through my mind."

Sandra, who is also a mum-of-three and grandmother, was forced to give up work following her diagnosis.

"It devastated me, having to give up work," she said. "I thought, 'I can't believe it'. You know, you've dedicated your life to looking after people and then you end up getting something like this."

She sought Thompsons Solicitors' support to secure not only answers from the people responsible for exposing her to such hazardous materials, but also compensation to fund treatment that is often not available to mesothelioma patients on the NHS.

"Thompsons Solicitors were invaluable in getting me the support I needed and taking my case," she said. "My solicitor came out to see me and has been absolutely brilliant. She's more like a friend than a solicitor."

Louise Larkin, the specialist asbestos solicitor who supported Sandra's case, said: **"It's really important that people understand that it isn't just older men in heavy industry who suffer with mesothelioma, but young men and women from all different trades and professions. Mesothelioma doesn't discriminate, and even low levels of exposure can cause a risk of developing the disease. This is why we are warning people about the ongoing risks of asbestos exposure to ensure that we don't see more stories like Sandra's."**

News in brief – funds available

Thompsons Solicitors would like to support you to attend this year's British Thoracic Oncology Group Conference. If you are looking to go to the British Thoracic Oncology Group Conference and need financial assistance, then please consider applying to the Thompsons LCNUK Conference Fund, for sums up to £500. Please contact Helen Tomlin at helentomlin@thompsons.law.co.uk for more information.





Action needs to be taken immediately to keep our firefighters safe

Thompsons Solicitors is supporting the Fire Brigades Union's (FBU) call on the government to protect firefighters, following research that found they are being exposed to dangerous levels of toxic chemicals.

Cancer deaths amongst firefighters have been growing steadily since the 1970s. It's well known that firefighters are exposed to dangerous chemicals, such as carcinogens, cancerous gases and dust on a routine basis as they respond to incidents, but the hidden risk of toxins unknowingly contaminating people's skin and clothes after the job is done has been talked about less.

Helen Tomlin, specialist asbestos solicitor at Thompsons Solicitors, commented: "It's a disgrace that courageous professionals are at risk of cancer because the government is ignoring scientific evidence. We echo the FBU's calls for better protective equipment, preventative medical care, education and support. These brave men and women risk their lives on a daily basis.

"Now that the UK's senior fire officers appear to have acknowledged the high rate of cancer, action needs to be taken immediately to keep our firefighters safe."

The risks of exposure to hazardous substances from contaminated work clothes came to light when a growing number of firefighters developed diseases including cancers and asbestos-related conditions.

Helen said: "In my work as an asbestos specialist, I am used to seeing claims on behalf of people with serious health complications in later life as a result of exposure to asbestos dust at home from overalls and work clothes. Fire service personnel clearly face a similar risk if the kit they use for training, and equipment worn when responding to an emergency, is handled incorrectly afterwards."

Firefighters are not only at risk of occupational cancer but long-term exposure to harmful substances and dangerous chemicals during the course of their duties can also cause a number of respiratory problems.

To reduce the risk of developing occupational cancer, firefighters should:

- Ensure their uniform and kit are thoroughly, and safely, cleaned on a regular basis
- Remove their contaminated uniform as soon as possible after completing a call
- Store their uniform in a dedicated place away from other people to prevent further contamination
- Wash and decontaminate their body as soon as possible after each fire to avoid further exposure
- Clean their necks, faces and arms at the end of their shift to limit the chances of bringing harmful substances into the home.

In a bid to raise awareness of the dangers facing workers across all sectors, and provide workers and trade unionists with the tools and information they need to stay safe while at work, Thompsons has launched the Under The COSHH campaign, which you can find out more about here: thompsonstradeunion.law/news/campaigns/under-the-coshh

Photo credit: www.istockphoto.com, Circle Creative Studio

#PastButPresent

As part of our continued dedication to supporting patients suffering from asbestos-related diseases, we launched our #PastbutPresent campaign which aims to highlight the issues surrounding asbestos exposure. We are giving a voice to those with asbestos-related illnesses and their families. We want to tell their stories - past and present.

Our specialists have supported tens of thousands of workers with compensation claims. In some cases, we've supported clients who have developed asbestos diseases as a result of childhood exposure, living and playing near factories where asbestos was being manufactured into numerous products, or as a result of exposure from the clothes of loved ones who worked with asbestos dust.

Thompsons Solicitors takes an active role in supporting the Asbestos Victims Support Groups Forum in the UK, which provides places for people to meet, discuss and take action on behalf of those with an asbestos-related disease. We have links to asbestos support groups across the country to help those suffering from asbestos-related diseases find the support they need.

Thompsons Solicitors has been working closely with trade unions for almost 100 years to improve working standards and make vital changes to UK law. We are one of the UK's leading asbestos litigation solicitors and the firm that brought the first-ever successful case for asbestos-related disease in the UK to the House of Lords in 1972. We have decades of experience in running and winning

compensation for clients who have developed an asbestos-related disease as a result of their working conditions.

We continue to stand with trade union members and their families who have experienced the devastating effects of past asbestos exposure to ensure that those responsible are held to account.

Find out more about how you can support the campaign at www.thompsons.law/news/campaigns/asbestos-past-but-present.



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