

Two construction companies have been fined after Sub-Contractors working under their control were exposed to asbestos fibres during school refurbishment work.

Derby Crown Court heard that on 1st August 2016, Oakwood Junior School in Derby was undergoing refurbishment work during the school holidays. During the work, two Sub-Contractors removing suspended ceiling tiles from rooms in the school entered a storage room which had a suspended ceiling made from asbestos containing ceiling tiles. They started to remove the tiles, unaware that they contained asbestos, potentially exposing themselves to harmful asbestos fibres. A licensed asbestos removal company working on site alerted management to the situation and action was taken to stop the work and deal with the contamination.

An investigation by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), found that Ashe Construction Limited, the Principal Contractor for the project, had failed to effectively plan, manage and monitor the work to prevent the accidental removal of the asbestos containing tiles. Ashe Construction Limited failed to effectively communicate information about the asbestos, leaving the storage room open without barriers or signage warning of asbestos. The work was then not suitably managed or monitored to ensure that nobody came into contact with the asbestos.

The HSE investigation also found that Cladceil Limited, a Contractor appointed by Ashe Construction Limited to carry out the suspended ceiling removal work, also failed to effectively plan, manage and monitor the work. The company appointed a Sub-Contractor to remove the suspended ceilings on itself but provided only a generic Risk Assessment and Method Statement which failed to identify important information, including the asbestos risk.

Ashe Construction Limited, Ashe House, Crooks Way, Hitchin, Hertfordshire SG4 0JE, pleaded guilty to breaching Regulation 13(1) of the Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2015 and Section 3(1) of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974. It was fined £100,000 and ordered to pay costs of £9,759.76.

Cladceil Limited, 2 Lace Market Square, Nottingham NG11 1PB, pleaded guilty to breaching Regulation 15(1) of the Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2015. It was fined £12,000 and ordered to pay costs of £47,184.48.

Speaking after the hearing, HSE Inspector Andrew Bowker said: *“The exposure to asbestos could so easily have been avoided if the two companies involved had put sufficient effort into planning, managing and monitoring the ceiling tile removal work. The HSE will not hesitate to take appropriate enforcement action against those that fall below the required standards.”*