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From: CBLITTON@aol.com

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Sent: Friday, September 30, 2005 6:25 PM

Subject: new booker

The 'great asbestos scam' continues, not least thanks to the glaring inadequacies of a nationwide 'training scheme' for surveyors, which leaves many none the wiser as to how properly to assess risks. The Yorkshire Evening Post has recently run a series of front-page scare stories about the discovery of 'deadly asbestos' on the site of a demolished Leeds hospital. After a surveyor's report, a contractor offered to remove the 'killer dust' at a cost of £20,000.

Fortunately for the site's owners, they called in Asbestos Watchdog, the body run by a genuine asbestos expert, John Bridle, which was set up following this column's exposure of how many surveyors and contractors are exploiting the general confusion over the dangers of asbestos (and which has saved our readers millions of pounds). An inspection of the site by Mr Bridle, who is now working closely with the Health and Safety Executive, found that the minute quantities of crushed white asbestos cement posed no risk to health, and could be safely disposed of – with the full approval of local environmental officials – thus saving £200,000.

When the owners of a Torbay bowling alley were recently told by a surveyor that he had found 'dangerous levels of asbestos' in the roof, which would cost them £85,000 to remove (plus the cost of a new roof), they again called in Asbestos Watchdog. When Mr Bridle found 'no measurable amounts of asbestos' the surveyor summoned a local environmental health officer. He had recently, along with 70 of his colleagues, attended a seminar given by Mr Bridle, who demonstrated to his satisfaction that the tiny amounts of asbestos on the site posed no risk. Again, the owners were saved over £100,000.

Over the past year or two, Asbestos Watchdog has had hundreds of cases where owners or managers of property, including many churches, have been told by surveyors that, under the new regulations, their premises contained dangerous asbestos which must be removed at astronomic cost. In the vast majority of cases, expert inspection showed that the surveyors had seriously misrepresented the situation, and that removal was not necessary.

What most of these surveyors had in common was that their only qualification was a 'P402', to show they had taken a training course given by the British Occupational Hygiene Society (formerly the British Institute of Occupational Hygiene). This sounds like an official body, but is in fact a private company, registered as a charity, run by a staff of 11 in Derby.

The BOHS courses, taken by 5000 surveyors a year at £400 a time, offer no more than an introduction to the inspection procedures laid down by the HSE in a document called MDHS100. When I asked the BOHS last week whether they had any resident experts in asbestos, and what were their qualifications, they replied that their 'proficiency modules in asbestos related subjects were all developed in direct consultation with the HSE'. In fact, as senior HSE officials confirm, the BOHS is in no way approved by the HSE. The only connection is that its courses are based on an HSE document.

So alarmed was the BOHS a while back by Asbestos Watchdog's questioning of advice given by P402 qualified surveyors that it instigated a trading standards prosecution against Mr Bridle, for having included P402 among his qualifications on a letterhead. This was because, after taking the course and being told he could use the P402 on his letters, he had then been told that, as a 'sole trader', he was not eligible to quality.

The judge dismissed most charges, but found Mr Bridle guilty of the minor technical offence of using P402 on a single letter (to the BOHS) – since when, in an effort to discredit him, the BOHS has lost no opportunity to publicise his conviction. The HSE, well aware of Mr Bridle's unrivalled expertise, knows better, which is why it now fully supports what Asbestos Watchdog is doing. Any reader concerned at advice they are given by surveyors holding a P402 and wanting a second opinion should contact www.asbestoswatchdog.co.uk