

The William Martin Annual COMPLIANCE REPORT

Ten key industry trends facing property, facilities management and health & safety professionals.



William Martin

Foreword



In today's dynamic and fast-paced world, the importance of health and safety compliance has emerged as a cornerstone of organisational resilience and sustainability. As the use of property evolves and workplaces transform, the imperative to cultivate environments that prioritise the wellbeing of all occupants has never been more pressing.

At a time where the health, safety, and wellbeing of all building users is paramount, the property and facilities management industry bears a profound responsibility to uphold the highest standards of health and safety. As we navigate through a landscape of developing legislation, the imperative for vigilance in safeguarding occupants, employees, contractors, and visitors has never been more pronounced.

Whether it's maintaining rigorous safety controls, implementing effective emergency response procedures or investing in cutting edge technologies to monitor and mitigate risks, it is increasingly important to measure and understand the 'status' of compliance. Furthermore, opportunities to benefit from enhanced technological advances through integrated systems, as William Martin now offers clients through its Meridian, Prosure360, Elogs and Barbour platforms, are increasingly being realised.

With the above in mind, we at William Martin are very pleased to publish our first property compliance report detailing 10 key industry trends that we think will be of interest to property compliance professionals.

We've identified these by reviewing the 20,000 risk assessment and survey reports held in Meridian, our health and safety risk management platform, produced for clients by William Martin consultants from April 2023 to March 2024. We are already planning for our property compliance report to be published annually, which will further enable longer term trends to be identified.

We hope the key trends contained in this report will support those involved with compliance management to further focus on key compliance initiatives within their own businesses, to reduce risk to all occupants and users of commercial and residential buildings.



Phil Jones CMIOSH

Managing Director
William Martin



1.

Property and Facilities Management professionals are busier than ever.

In 2023 alone, figures from our risk management platform Meridian showed that a total of 327,000 actions were raised across all disciplines, a 22% increase since the previous year.

With a variety of new legislation coming into play, it is unsurprising that the number of actions has risen. Alongside the introduction of new laws, we're seeing a far bigger push across all businesses towards ensuring best practice and continuous improvement, rather than mere compliance.

As a result, we are seeing ever-growing, increasingly complex workloads and more pressure than ever before on people whose responsibilities include health and safety.

This poses the challenge as to how businesses can continue to prove their commitment to compliance standards and best practice, all while reducing the pressure put on integral teams to demonstrate this.

Technology can help and is something we would like to see businesses using more of soon. Providing a more streamlined approach, risk management software platforms such as Meridian can be a valuable and time-saving tool. By harnessing its power through integrations with other systems, businesses can gain a better understanding of the key areas for improvement and reduce the likelihood of certain actions arising in future, whilst simultaneously relieving the pressure put on current workloads.

Looking to the future, more and more research is being published on how new data-led, AI-driven methods can transform the traditional risk assessment process, leading to more accurate risk-based judgements.

Near-miss detection, incident reporting or trend analysis may also be handled by AI—and in this era of rapidly-evolving technology, new possibilities are always arising.

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While compliance is key, we strongly believe that abiding by legislation should not be the final goal, but the minimum benchmark. So while any industry trend to move beyond a tick-box approach is clearly a positive step towards encouraging safer work environments, the need for sufficient reporting to demonstrate high performance has ramped up massively.

Adam Scotchmer -
Health and Safety Technical Lead

2.

With workloads on the rise, it is frequently taking too long to remediate top priority actions from risk assessments.

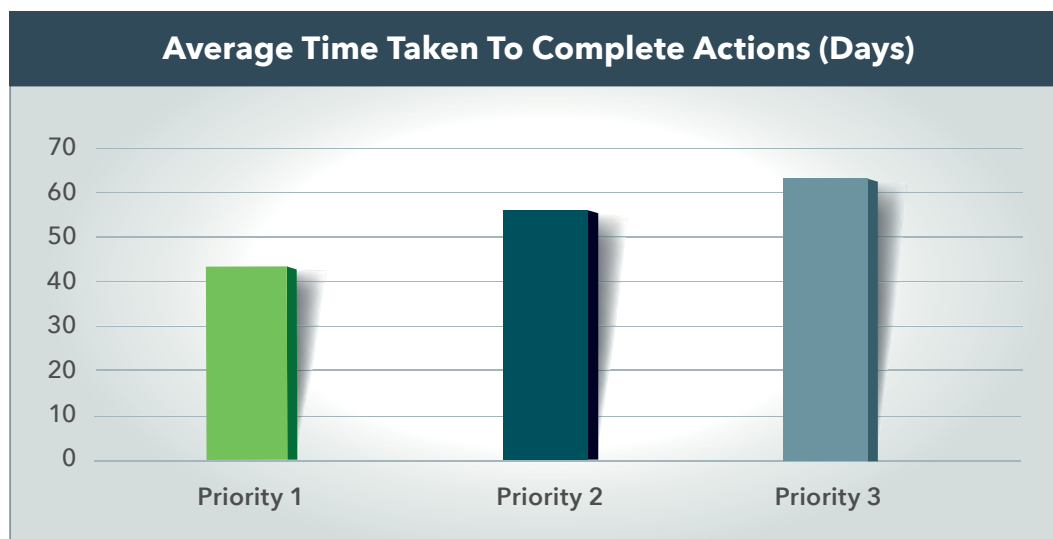
Analysing data from our 20,000 risk assessment and survey reports, 422 high priority actions were identified and we found the average time taken to complete these was 42 days. This shows an immediate need for top priority cases to be tackled sooner, to eradicate the possibility of bigger issues arising down the line.

Ideally, P1 issues need to be actioned as soon as is reasonably practicable, even if it's an interim measure to make an area safe until a permanent solution is found.

The consequences of leaving P1 actions too long can be hugely detrimental to any business. If an incident happens that the HSE or the local authority environmental health department decide to investigate, they will want to see very strong evidence that an organisation has addressed the risk quickly. If this evidence doesn't exist, it can lead to a criminal prosecution, resulting in fines and a possible custodial sentence. And as workloads continue to grow, the delay with resolving these actions is becoming an even bigger challenge, causing a higher risk of accidents and their consequences.

There are, however, steps that can be taken to reduce these delays. Streamlined software systems, for example, play an important role in allowing businesses to keep track of top priority actions, and providing clear insight into the precautions that need to be taken to resolve these actions.

The solution is not complex—pay more attention to top priority actions in the moment and take a “there and then” approach to remediate them quickly before it is too late. However, figures show that despite this, there is still a concerning lack of urgency, and more needs to be done to overcome this issue.



3.

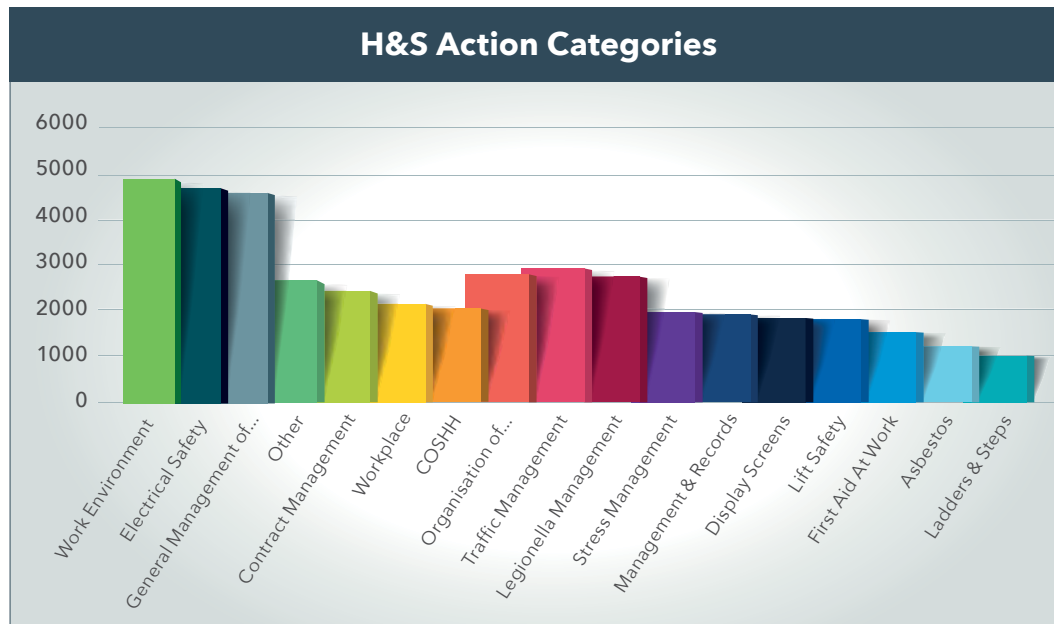
Work environment, electrical safety and general management are still the top area of focus.

Of all actions raised last year, our records showed that 40% were related to general health and safety management. This doesn't necessarily mean that effective health and safety measures are lacking, but instead, may reflect the ever-increasing range of responsibilities that fall on the shoulders of health and safety professionals.

As businesses continue to up their game to

comply with tighter legislation and work towards best practice, the criteria to achieve this has vastly increased. Ultimately, this increase in criteria has also driven the need for more vigorous risk assessments, policy implementation and record keeping, leading to a higher number of health and safety actions overall. With this, more input is required from responsible teams to successfully manage and resolve these actions.

It is promising to see businesses driving safer workplaces and paying more attention to remaining compliant with health and safety standards, however, the reality is that health and safety professionals are working harder than ever, and this isn't set to slow down soon. Going forward, businesses need to focus more on how to best support their teams, and provide the resources needed to implement health and safety policies and procedures, to maximise productivity and prevent any shortcomings.



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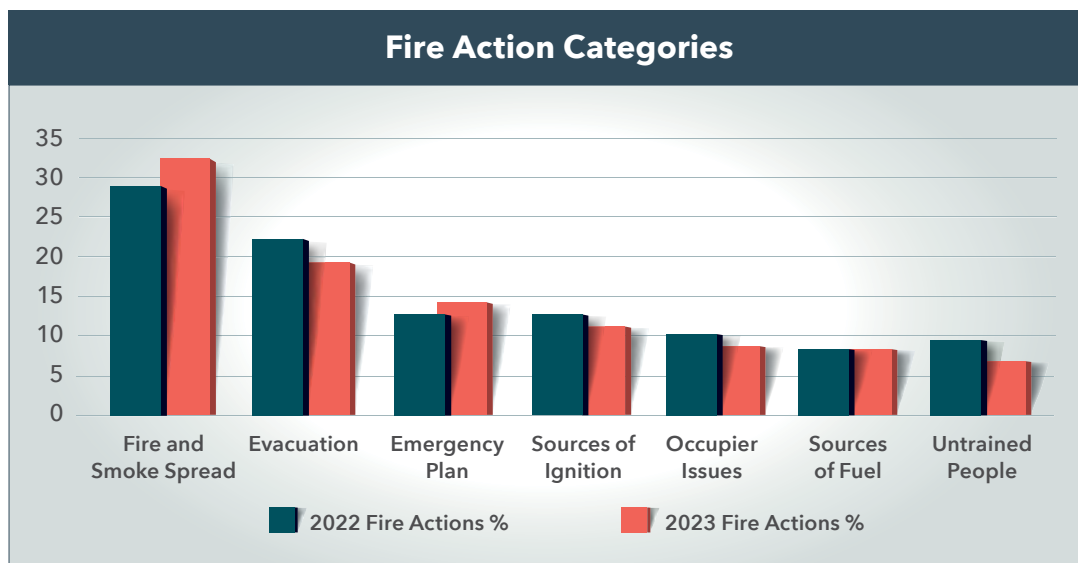
Adam Scotchmer -
Health and Safety Technical Lead



4.

32% of fire actions related to fire and smoke spread, with the most common action relating to inadequate fire doors.

High performing fire doors play a vital role in containing fires, protecting escape routes, providing fire protection and ultimately, safeguarding lives and property. But with 32% of actions over the past year linked to fire and smoke spread, over half of these (60%) were related to fire doors. This highlights a worrying gap in the precautions taken to successfully fit and maintain them.



Because they are one of the principal ways of preventing the spread of fire, the standard that today's fire doors must meet, in terms of the materials they are made from and how they are manufactured, is high. But as these figures show, something is going wrong somewhere.

There are several factors contributing to this issue, but first and foremost, fire doors must be correctly installed by a competent contractor. There is still room for improvement on that front. Poor maintenance of fire doors is a far bigger problem. If, for example, a self-closer stops working, that door is no longer fit for purpose. Low-quality routine checks also amplify room for error, increasing the risk of fire spread.

Now, more than ever, we need to improve the processes around routine checking and inspection protocols, capturing and actioning any defects as soon as possible, to guarantee safety and security in the instance of any fire.



5.

Fire safety is increasingly adding to the numbers. Nearly a quarter of our remedial actions related to fire.

Our statistics showed nearly a quarter of all remedial actions last year (23%) were related to fire safety management, with the total number of actions rising by 53% when compared to the previous year. We can assume that new legislation that has been introduced in recent years, including the Building Safety Act 2022, has been a key driver in causing the number of fire safety actions to skyrocket. Requirements have tightened across a variety of areas contributing to fire safety, such as limiting the spread of fire and smoke, emergency plans and evacuation processes.

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It's right that in the wake of the Grenfell tragedy, fire safety requirements have become more onerous. The result, however, is increased pressure on facilities managers and property managers to efficiently manage and resolve the rising number of fire safety actions.

Kevin Thorp -
Fire Safety Technical Lead

We have no doubt that the number of fire safety actions will reduce in the long-term, as people get used to the influx of new laws and guidance—but it will not be an instant transition.

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Looking at how businesses can alleviate some of the stress on the people responsible for fire safety, software management systems will always provide an easy route to better analysis of information and more efficient record keeping.

Kevin Thorp -
Fire Safety Technical Lead

For now, businesses need to take time to better understand these changes and put an effective plan of action in place to meet new standards. Looking at how businesses can alleviate some of the stress on the people responsible for fire safety, software management systems will always provide an easy route to the better analysis of information and more efficient record keeping.



6.

10% of all health and safety actions relate to preventing slips, trips and falls.

Last year, our records showed that 10% of all health and safety actions related to preventing slips, trips, and falls. Of these, 32% happened on surfaces that were on the same level.

Due to human nature, completely eradicating the occurrence of these accidents is impossible. From time to time, we will all misstep or lose concentration while walking around. What we can do, however, is make sure there are no obvious hazards that make these incidents more likely to happen.

While there is a place for painting a line on a step to make it more visible, or putting up signage to warn of a possible hazard, we would like to see more focus on actually removing the hazard. While warning signs are often the most simple and cost-effective ways of reducing accidents, they are essentially just papering over the cracks.

If there's an opportunity for a hazard to be removed altogether, it should be considered. If a business wants to maximise health and safety measures through tangible action, they may decide to level that uneven surface or remove those unnecessary edges and steps.

Regularly reviewing a facility for hazards, ensuring correct use of signage, whilst being open to investing in long-term solutions is crucial for any business. Maintaining the safety measures within your facilities, to the highest standard possible, is key to a lowered accident rate.





7.

Passenger lift documentation and record keeping performance remains a challenge for property management professionals.

Our statistics show that 22% of all P1 health and safety actions last year related to lift safety.

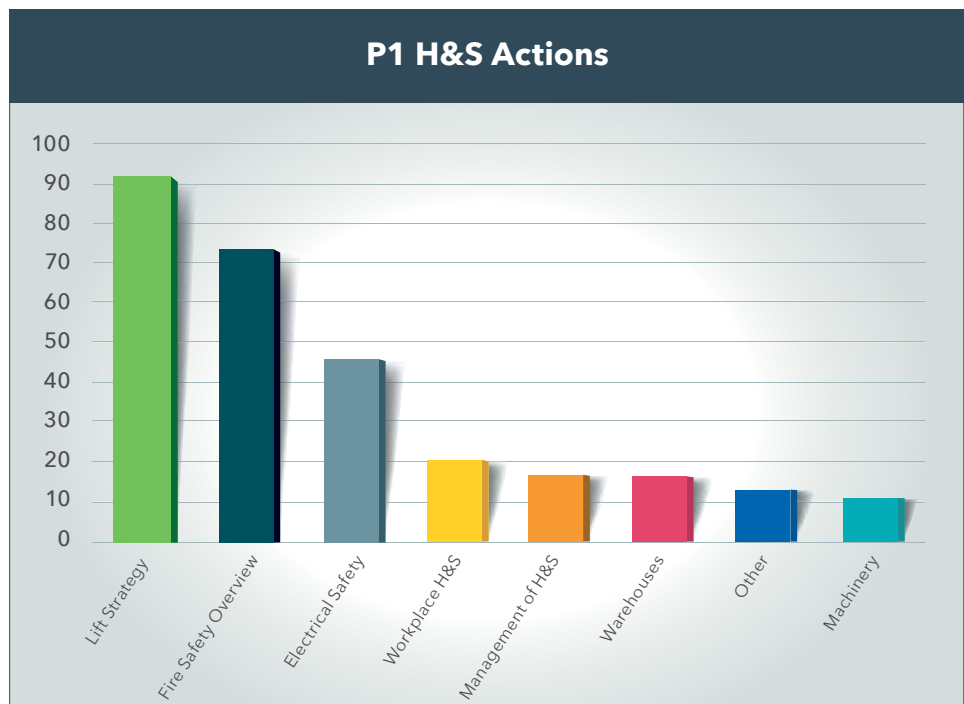
A particular problem we're seeing is a lack of thorough examination records. The law requires that all passenger lifts should be thoroughly examined at least every six months, and following 'exceptional circumstances' such as lift damage or failure, long periods out of use or a major change in operating conditions which is likely to affect the integrity of the equipment.

Most of the time, a lack of records isn't because the testing hasn't been done, but because it has been carried out by a third party - such as an insurance

engineer - and uploaded to a portal somewhere that nobody in your organisation can find or get access to quickly. If the system where the examination records are located is not linked to your own systems, finding the records you need to prove you are compliant can be a real challenge.

If your compliance and risk management software can 'talk' to other software platforms, finding the examination records you need will be much more straightforward. Our platform, Meridian, has a direct link to various insurance statutory documentation platforms, where most lift examination documentation is located.

When it comes to lift safety, complacency can also set in, because most of the time the consequences of lift failure are not catastrophic. When resources are tight, this can sometimes lead to other aspects of health and safety being prioritised - which is something we would always advise against.

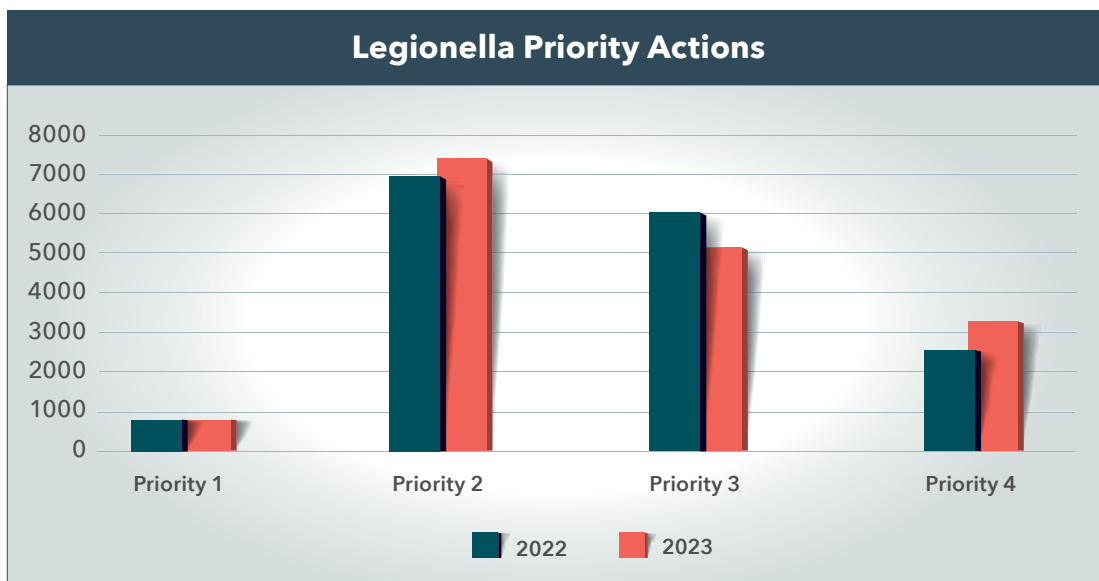




8. With a lack of legionella control regime documentation and accurate record keeping, are assumptions being made that adequate controls are in place?

Of the 17,000 legionella actions recorded last year, 4% were P1, requiring immediate attention.

These actions include logbooks that were missing documentation, or PPM records showing some tasks aren't being completed or are being done insufficiently.



With legionella control, we can't assume that the correct record keeping is being done and is just missing or inaccessible. If something goes wrong that involves legionella, regulators will want to examine your records line-by-line. If you can't prove that you've taken all reasonable precautions, the consequences for your organisation could be dire. That's why careful record keeping is so essential.

The highest risk equipment type we deal with is cooling towers for air conditioning. These need special attention as they are where outbreaks are most likely to occur and spread the legionella bacteria into the air for multiple people to breathe in. Cooling towers are still prevalent in public and private sector buildings, and they need a high degree of control. This equipment caused the major outbreak in Cumbria in 2002, so if your property has a cooling tower, we'd advise extra vigilance.



9.

We neglect legionella risk at our peril.

As mentioned, the last major legionella outbreak to hit the headlines was back in August 2002, when seven members of the public died and 180 people became ill because of an outbreak of legionella at an arts and leisure facility in Barrow in Furness, Cumbria.

Because this was 22 years ago, and fatalities over the past two decades have been low when compared to other areas of health and safety such as falls from height, there is always a danger of complacency setting in. In recent times, we have identified a trend that legionella control may have become more of a 'complete the paperwork' exercise as opposed to implementing effective on-site controls on a day-to-day basis.

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It's maybe just luck that the UK has avoided a major legionella outbreak for so long - something that would inevitably put legionella back to the very top of the health and safety agenda again. Nobody wants to see that happen, so we must all remain vigilant and maintain a firm focus on legionella control.

Simon Bruce -
Legionella Technical Lead

Our statistics show that in the past year, around 17,000 actions were raised relating to legionella, so the issue has not gone away. Most of the time these actions relate to water heaters and calorifiers that aren't operating at high enough temperatures. When it comes to equipment, we can't just rely on it to do what it is supposed to, especially as a lot of it can often be quite old. Maintenance and testing is vital, as is accurate recording and documentation.

Changes to water systems also require careful attention. For example, a water system might have what is known as a 'dead leg' - a dead end of a pipe that's full of water but is still connected to the supply system. If that water stays in that pipe and isn't circulated, bacteria can grow there and then populate the rest of the water system. Manual checking, to identify potential hazards such as this via a robust risk assessment process, is vital to ensuring your system is efficient and safe.



EVALUATION



PRIORITIES



ANALYSIS



PROCEDURES



REGULATIONS



GOVERNANCE

DANGER ASBESTOS REMOVAL

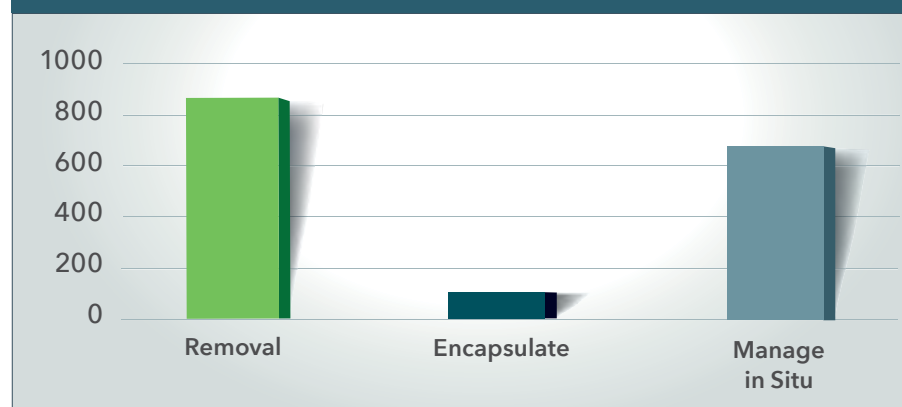
10.

Even though we recorded a similar number of remedial actions when compared with last year, there was a 29% increase in the number of actions requiring asbestos removal.

Half of last year's asbestos-related actions required its removal - with a 29% year-on-year increase in the overall number of actions. This indicates the poor condition of asbestos in many of our buildings.

It is a legal requirement for organisations to have an asbestos management plan in place, to follow that plan, and to maintain an asbestos register. So, instead of awaiting the routine annual re-inspection from an external consultancy, building owners and managers should be undertaking their own regular and thorough inspections within their facilities, ensuring that they are in consistent alignment with asbestos regulations. Failure to do so can still result in serious consequences.

Categories of Asbestos Management Actions



“ Despite being banned for 25 years, asbestos is still the biggest cause of work-related deaths in Great Britain. Thankfully, these deaths are starting to decline, and that welcome trend is expected to continue. However, we can't afford to be complacent. Despite the promise of a future free from asbestos-related harm, there is plenty of work to be done in the present, and an ongoing focus is vital.

Mark Harrison -
Asbestos Technical Lead

The industry needs to stop solely relying on an annual tick-in-the-box survey and take some responsibility for going over and above the minimum requirements. More robust measures are needed to ensure the highest standards possible are delivered around asbestos safety. These could include thorough training programmes for both staff and contractors on how to avoid accidental damage to asbestos, and raising general awareness of the signs that the asbestos in your building is in poor condition.



Compliance without compromise

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Consultancy: Unparalleled expertise to safeguard your people and property.



Meridian: Our online compliance and risk management platform gives you total visibility.



Prosure360: Take control of your supply chain, confidently and efficiently.



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