Action to Tackle Fraudulent Asbestos Surveyors Defrauding Householders and Businesses and Threatening Health

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The British Occupational Hygiene Society, the leading awarding organisation for professionals involved in the identification, protection and analysis of asbestos is leading a national initiative to drive out criminals from the asbestos surveying industry.

Asbestos, a substance found in hundreds of thousands of UK buildings becomes cancer causing when it is disturbed, resulting in around 5,000 preventable deaths a year. Identifying the presence of asbestos requires specialist knowledge to safely survey, identify likely places where is present and to safely take samples.

However, around 100 companies in the UK are offering asbestos survey services without any training or qualification or using fraudulent certifications. The result is seriously endangering the health of householders and often goes hand-in-hand with sharp business practice and unlawful and dangerous removal practices.

BOHS has been assisting trading standards and a separate investigation by the Daily Mail newspaper to bring fraudulent asbestos surveyors to justice.

Responding to a national initiative, announced this week to tackle qualifications fraud Ofqual's action plan for the prevention of qualification fraud – GOV.UK, BOHS is announcing the launch of several initiatives aimed at keeping businesses and homeowners safe from this criminal enterprise.

A national Register of Qualified Asbestos Surveyors is being launched, in consultation with the Royal Society for Public Health, which also awards in this area. The register will go live next month to enable individual surveyors to have their qualifications checked by those using their services, their employers and regulators. The scheme runs alongside work being done by ARCA, the asbestos contractors trade body, to ensure asbestos surveyors using the CSCS scheme have validated qualifications when working on construction sites. It also underpins the national quality scheme run by UKAS to accredit asbestos surveying companies.

Asbestos surveyors will have six months to verify their qualifications and have the opportunity to join a voluntary complaints scheme run by the professional body for asbestos experts, the Faculty of Asbestos Assessment and Management (FAAM). Verified surveyors will be able to use a logo, with an embedded verification QR code to provide clients with assurance of certification.

FAAM will also be issuing a "buyer's guide" in March, aimed at helping businesses and individuals make procurement decisions to minimize risk and help them comply with the law.

In addition, FAAM will issue a standards statement, which outlines the competences and skills required to undertake safe and effective surveys, bringing together regulatory guidance and standards to help businesses, lawyers and insurers have a clear understanding of the professional standard of competence and care for contracts and in the case of claims in negligence.

BOHS CEO, Professor Kevin Bampton says, "Last year the scale of fraud on homeowners had got to the extent that a Google search was more likely to offer you a scam provider than a legitimate one. You can't see, smell or taste whether asbestos is present, but the health consequences of disturbing it can be very significant and it can be a blight on property. Criminals have been exploiting a loophole in the law that puts the burden on the building owner to manage asbestos. By preying on fear and the difficulty in detecting the substance, they have been ripping off businesses and home-owners and putting their health at risk."

He continues, "As the awarding organisation for those who have been trained in this complex area, we feel the need to do more to make the public aware of the risks. We have to be clear that surveying a building for the presence of asbestos is a highly complex task and a qualification on its own is not enough. But without doubt, you should never employ a surveyor without a valid BOHS P402 or RSPH Level 3 Survey qualification."

BOHS has been the leading awarding body for asbestos surveyors for decades, but recent years have

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seen an alarming growth in criminal activity, including the falsification of certificates. BOHS is a charity and registration including the cost of the complaints scheme and administration of the logo verification will cost each surveyor only £20.

“We strongly advocate that people use UKAS accredited surveying firms, but also recognize that there are excellent surveyors who are not in that scheme. As the professional body, FAAM want to ensure that those who have a duty to manage asbestos can access the appropriate level of professional advice and guidance. Our three-fold approach to tackle qualifications fraud, help intelligent procurement and make a clear statement of minimum standards of competence aims to help deliver this. We want to avoid as many unnecessary deaths and reduce criminal activity as far as we can.”

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