



Vintec

Asbestos Testing Services

**THE
FIVE
BIGGEST MISTAKES
IN ASBESTOS
MANAGEMENT,**

AND HOW TO AVOID THEM IN 2018

Introduction

Avoiding these five mistakes will help you stay compliant and help you achieve cost effective, gold standard asbestos compliance.

Why me? How come I know this stuff!

I know what you're thinking. What gives you the authority to write this? What do you know about effective asbestos management?

Well, I've been working in the asbestos industry since 1991. I've seen what works, what doesn't work and what blows a carefully set budget. Over the years I've worked with experts, cowboys, the conscientious and the downright crooked. Basically, I've worked with all manner of clients on all types of sites.

I've seen companies blow small fortunes on well-meaning but ultimately misguided asbestos remediation.

I've seen surveys costing thousands that have been totally unfit for purpose. Not because the surveyors were useless, but because they weren't given the right information up front. I've also seen survey reports riddled with inappropriate caveats and assumptions that should never have made it into a final report.

I've worked to improve the asbestos management procedures for many companies, local authorities, schools and colleges amongst others.

So, I thought it was high time I shared some of what I've learnt with those that need to know it.



Andrew Stirrat

The reason why we manage asbestos

The health risks of asbestos are very well publicised. What doesn't get mentioned quite as often is the financial liability of getting asbestos wrong.

At Vintec we've seen it all too often. We've spoken to too many people who have had projects come to a grinding halt because they've stumbled across asbestos they had been blissfully unaware of.

We've also had to deal with the after effects of HSE intervention and the stress and cost that this brings. Prosecution by the HSE always makes the press, damages reputation and will cost you a tidy sum in fines, court costs and reparation.

So here they are. The five biggest mistakes, and how to avoid them. Reading this will protect your people, your budget and your projects.

MISTAKE 1

NOT BEING CRYSTAL CLEAR ABOUT THE GOALS OF THE ASBESTOS SURVEY

All asbestos survey firms have a standard set of exclusions and caveats.

They churn them out in report after report and the client very rarely questions them. In fact they very rarely even read them. It's scary how many people flick straight to the floor plan or the asbestos register and don't bother to read the rest of the report.

To be fair, most caveats and exclusions are perfectly reasonable. The problem is that these caveats and exclusions won't necessarily align with your aims for the survey. This may not become apparent until months after the survey has been completed but sooner or later it will come back to bite you.

If you haven't come across these standard exclusions before, they are things like:

- **No access to live electrics**
- **No access above three metres**
- **No access to lift shafts**

Nothing unreasonable... until that old fuse box needs changing. Or until you need to fit that new light to the four metre high workshop ceiling. Or until the lift engineer needs to access the lift shaft. These are probably the most common examples, but you get the picture.

Like I said, none of the above are unreasonable, but neither are they insurmountable.

Prior planning and having the right enabling teams on site during the asbestos survey may slightly increase the cost but it will get you a survey that is fit for purpose.

It also means you don't need to keep calling the surveyors back to site time and time again.

MISTAKE 1 CONTINUED...

NOT BEING CRYSTAL CLEAR ABOUT THE GOALS OF THE ASBESTOS SURVEY

All reputable asbestos survey firms will have relationships with trades such as electricians, lift engineers and carpenters. They will also have surveyors trained to use specialist access equipment and to enter confined spaces.

So make sure you utilise them to their maximum.

While the above are reasonable, some of the caveats I've read in survey reports are staggering.

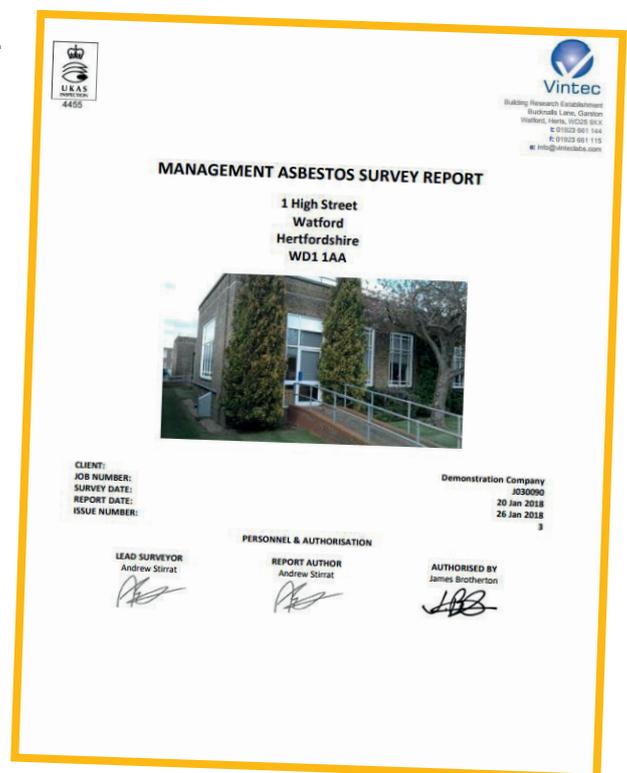
The worst example I've come across was in a refurbishment asbestos survey which had been conducted prior to modernisation works at a hospital. The front page identified the report as a 'Refurbishment Survey'. The header on every single page described the report as a 'Refurbishment Survey'. I didn't count the number of times the phrase 'refurbishment survey' was used in the report, but it would have been close to 100.

The client was happy that the surveyors had done a good job. They hadn't reported any issues or difficulties and had completed the survey ahead of schedule.

When I reviewed the report I was a little concerned by the lack of intrusive inspections. Then I spotted it. A single line in the caveat.

A line that the client really should have read. The line was 'Due to levels of occupation, we have only conducted a management asbestos survey.'

The client already had a perfectly good management survey. The report was a complete waste of time and effort.



Get the survey you need. Not the one the surveyor wants you to have!

MISTAKE 2

NOT UNDERSTANDING THE LIMITATIONS OF YOUR REGISTER!

It's all been going so well.

You've fulfilled your legal obligation and complied with the Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012.

You've had the management asbestos survey carried out, compiled the asbestos register, written and implemented an effective management plan.

The asbestos register is held at reception and all contractors who come to the premises are asked to read and sign it. Basically, you are 100% compliant. Big tick. Gold star! Certainly better than most. And then...

It's Monday morning. Over the weekend, the British weather has damaged a section of roof and the rain has got in. The ceiling

is water damaged and in need of immediate repair. A contractor is summoned and the asbestos management plan kicks in. The contractor is presented with the asbestos register and checks the information for the room in question. The ceiling is described as plaster and no asbestos containing materials (ACMs) are listed. All clear! So off he goes to affect a repair and take down the damaged section of ceiling.



Problem! The management asbestos survey won't have looked above a solid plastered ceiling. It's outside the scope. Even if you have nailed down the survey exclusions as per mistake #1.

Any manner of ACMs can be concealed within ceiling voids. Pipe insulation, insulation board fire breaks, spray coating, to name but a few.

At the very least you should consider having an asbestos surveyor present when that ceiling comes down. If anything suspicious is found, it can be sampled and a suitable plan put in place. The register can be updated and sensible presumptions made about similar areas.

MISTAKE 2 CONTINUED...

NOT UNDERSTANDING THE LIMITATIONS OF YOUR REGISTER!

If nothing suspicious is identified, the surveyor can get his head in the void, make some notes, take some photographs and update the survey and register accordingly.

Either way, you now have more data, so if the same thing happens in a nearby room you at least know what you're dealing with and can plan an appropriate response.

It may sound unlikely but this is exactly the situation that happens on a daily basis up and down the country. It could be the BT guy drilling through a wall to run a new cable, the plumber re-routing a pipe through a floor void, the TV engineer running the cable to the new aerial, or the carpenter fixing the new door furniture. Any or all of these can inadvertently be disturbing asbestos that would not have been identified in a management asbestos survey.

Sometimes, not fully understanding the scope of the survey you have can be more dangerous than having no survey at all.

MISTAKE 3

NOT USING PRIORITY ASSESSMENTS CORRECTLY (OR AT ALL)

Ok. Everybody knows about Priority Assessments.

The problem is that not everybody really gets **Priority Assessments**. Some clients I speak to assume they are included in the asbestos survey when, all they really have is a material assessment.

So what are they?

Priority Assessments are designed to tell you which ACMs you need to focus your efforts on. A high-risk material in an out of the way area could safely be left alone, while a medium risk material that is likely to be regularly disturbed will require immediate remedial actions.

Material Vs Priority

The Material Assessment will tell you the **severity of the risk** posed by each of the ACMs by assessing:

1. Product type
2. Condition/extent of damage
3. Surface treatment
4. Asbestos type

The Priority Assessment looks at the **risk to the occupants** by assessing the likelihood of the ACM being disturbed using the following criteria:

1. Location and extent
2. The use of the ACM
3. Occupancy levels
4. Activities carried out adjacent to the ACM
5. Maintenance activities and frequency

MISTAKE 3 CONTINUED...

NOT USING PRIORITY ASSESSMENTS CORRECTLY (OR AT ALL)

Why wouldn't the asbestos surveyor have done the Priority Assessment?

There are a number of reasons why Priority Assessments may not have been included in the survey:

1. You may not have requested them.
2. The majority of survey companies are not accredited to carry out Priority Assessments. To find out if they are accredited to conduct one, look on the UKAS accreditation schedule.
3. The surveyor didn't have the required information or knowledge of the site to make a reasoned assessment.

The priority assessment really should be compiled by the Duty Holder.

They are the ones that know about the activity, the occupation and the likely maintenance activities that will happen in any given area. If the survey company really doesn't want to help you with this, there are many useful tools on the internet, particularly on the HSE website.

Case Study

We recently helped a client compile Priority Assessments across a large portfolio of buildings. Their survey had flagged up dozens of high risk ACMs that our client now had to explain to his board of Directors.

Having completed the Priority Assessments, we were able to change the overall risk rating on the majority of the ACMs, which left only a few that needed to be dealt with urgently.

The cost of remediating the original high-risk ACMs in the survey would have been in excess of £100,000. By effectively utilising Priority Assessments, the final bill for sorting out the most urgent items was around £10,000.

Your asbestos management plan will be far less effective without a Priority Assessment. The cost of carrying out detailed priority assessments will usually be recouped by the savings you make by avoiding unnecessary remediation works.

MISTAKE 4

DON'T GET MUGGED! EMPLOY A SPECIALIST TO PREPARE THE ASBESTOS REMOVAL SPECIFICATION

This happens all the time and it drives me mad.

Usually by the time I've got involved it's too late. The money has been spent.

You can make substantial savings by employing an expert to draw up the removal specification. An expert will be able to better target the works and limit scope and therefore the costs. This approach has been shown to reduce the cost of remediation works by up to 30%.

A specification prepared by an independent expert (or usually your asbestos survey company) will provide a more targeted inventory of ACMs which need to be removed or encapsulated.

The asbestos survey should never be used as a specification for removal.

It's 100% not meant for that purpose! This approach simply invites the removal company to quote for removal. It is not in their interests to come up with more economical solutions or to restrict remediation works in any way whatsoever.

While the survey report records the findings, it doesn't necessarily assess implications and outcomes.

The specification should always be prepared in consultation with the duty holder, principal contractors, maintenance teams and any other stakeholders that may have useful input or who may be affected by the planned works.

MISTAKE 4 CONTINUED...

DON'T GET MUGGED! EMPLOY A SPECIALIST TO PREPARE THE ASBESTOS REMOVAL SPECIFICATION

Case Study

At a site in Earls Court we were able to save residents approximately £40,000 by abandoning a totally unnecessary asbestos removal job.

The client had an asbestos survey which identified asbestos lagging to a pipe running through a light well. The recommendation in the report was to remove the pipe lagging because the surveyor believed the lagging would be disturbed by the planned upgrade works to the heating. The client obtained three quotes for the removal. The cost of which would in all likelihood have meant cancelling the whole project.

After we reviewed the work, we were able to advise the client that the removal was unnecessary. The pipe in question was in excellent condition and the lagging was sealed behind bitumen-based encapsulant and chicken wire.

Having checked the pipe condition and applied sufficient highly visible warning labels, the project went ahead as planned and on budget.

I strongly suspect that the licensed asbestos removal companies knew that the removal was unnecessary but it wasn't in their interest to come clean.



MISTAKE 5

FAILING TO USE TECHNOLOGY

Early in 2017 I attended a day long seminar with Sir Clive Woodward.

One of the key messages he kept coming back to was that to win in the modern era you have to embrace technology.

He's absolutely right! This is as true in asbestos management as it is in international rugby, retail, finance, add your own examples here! The good news for asbestos management is that the technology you need has most likely been paid for by somebody else, and you can reap all the benefits for none of the outlay. Win win!

No, I haven't lost my mind. It's a fact.

If you've employed an asbestos surveyor recently, chances are you would have witnessed them using a tablet pc to record the survey data and take the photographs.

The beauty of these new systems is that they are just fancy databases which means the data can easily be reformatted for all sorts of uses. If the data is captured correctly, it needs very little manipulation to turn it into a completed report or management tool.

Most survey companies using such a system will be very likely to have the ability to grant clients access to log in and view the data with little or no cost to themselves.

The cloud based systems can transform an asbestos management plan from an unwieldy paper copy with scribbled amendments into a streamlined gold plated management tool. If the surveying company you use can't or won't do this at little or no cost, you need to re-think who does your surveys!

MISTAKE 5 CONTINUED...

FAILING TO USE TECHNOLOGY

The system operated by Vintec is briefly detailed below.

This is accessed via the client portal on our website. For smaller, less complicated sites, we tend to only use the Sites, Activity and Surveys tabs.

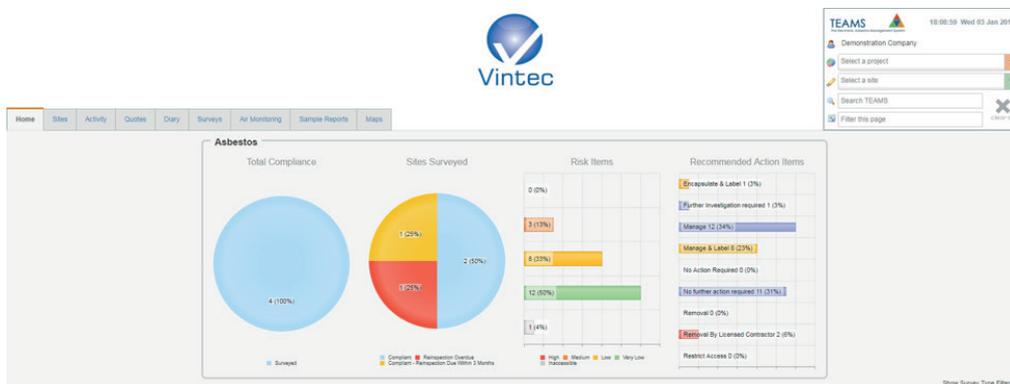
The home page has nine different tabs across the top. These tabs are used to navigate between the different sections of the portal. The tabs are:

- **Sites**
This is a searchable list of the client buildings. Clicking on the site allows you to drill down into the property and search by risk, location or recommendation.
- **Activity**
This tab gives you a detailed log of who has been doing what and when, and allows you to track who has been logging on and what they have viewed.
- **Quotes**
This will provide a list of any outstanding or existing quotes on the system.
- **Diary**
The diary tab allows you to view planned survey and air monitoring visits.
- **Projects**
Allows you to view specific project details.
- **Surveys**
All survey reports and data, fully searchable by location, risk or recommendation. You can also draw down complete pdf reports for any building, including historical data.
- **Air monitoring**
This tab gives access to all air monitoring reports conducted for the client. These can also be downloaded if required.
- **Sample reports**
This tab gives access to all bulk sample analysis reports. These can also be downloaded if required.

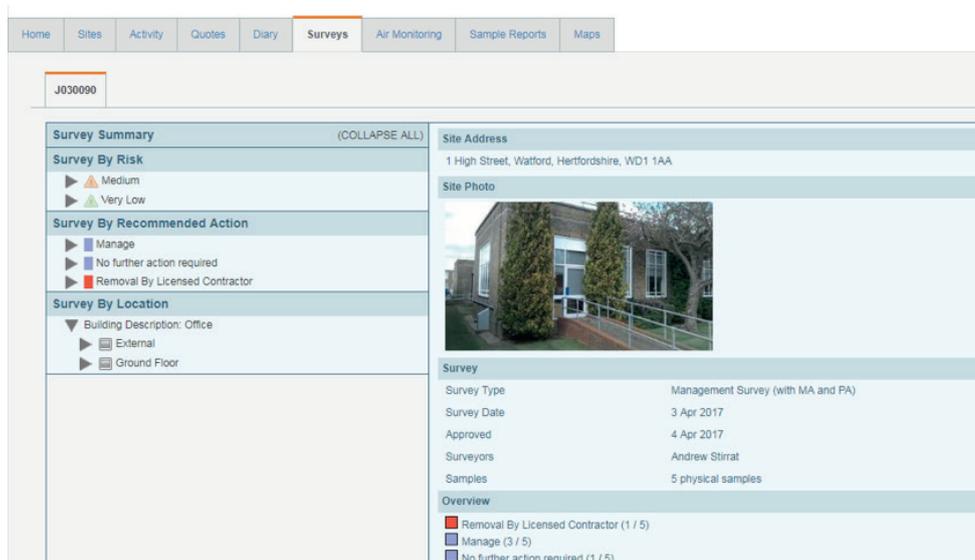
MISTAKE 5 CONTINUED...

FAILING TO USE TECHNOLOGY

All charts on the home page are fully searchable and clickable, allowing easy searching by site, building, room, risk score, recommended action etc.



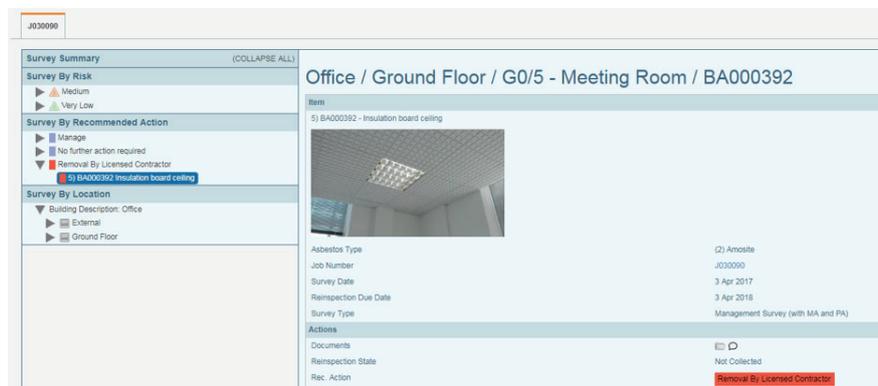
On the survey tab, clicking on the table icon takes the user into the survey details for the selected area where they can drill down into the data by clicking on a floor, room or a risk category. The risk is clearly marked by a simple colour coding system.



MISTAKE 5 CONTINUED...

FAILING TO USE TECHNOLOGY

Drilling down into the individual items, you are presented with a simple overview and photograph of the material in question.



The system is optimised to work with smartphones and mobile devices so that data can be interrogated from anywhere.

When operating from a mobile device or smartphone, a tailored version of the user interface is available which has simplified navigation with large controls which makes it easy to move between the different tabs and sections. Other elements of the standard portal have been cleared away from view and placed behind easy-to-access filters, giving the user more screen space for the information they are viewing.

This is only a brief overview of how the system works. We have two videos on our website which will give a much better idea of the capabilities of this system.

The videos can be viewed at:

<https://vintec labs.com/services/asbestos-management>

**Or simply scan
the QR code**



As the system is fully managed and maintained, any changes to guidance or legislation will be automatically incorporated.



Vintec

Asbestos Testing Services

Vintec Laboratories Ltd.

**Building Research Establishment
Bucknalls Lane
Watford
Hertfordshire
WD25 9XX**

Tel: 01923 661144

Fax: 01923 661115

Website: <https://vintecclabs.com>

Email: a.stirrat@vintecclabs.com