

FROM HERO TO ZERO: ACCREDITING ASBESTOS TESTING

Whilst asbestos may sound like a 20th Century problem, its effects are still being felt today, as Rob Bettinson, Development Manager at the United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS) illustrates. "Many years ago, asbestos was considered to be the latest wonder material for its high resistance to heat and other chemicals. Consequently it was added to thousands of different products, ranging from wall panels and tiles to lagging and painting materials. It was only several years later that its adverse effects were first identified, and it took until 1999 to finally ban it from being used in building materials. This means that any building constructed prior to that ban could contain asbestos somewhere in it."

Despite being a hazardous substance, the presence of asbestos in a building isn't necessarily a problem, as Bettinson goes on to explain. "Provided the asbestos is identified, monitored, maintained and removed where necessary, the potential risks can be properly managed." The regulations governing asbestos in buildings stipulate that anyone who is in control of the maintenance of an industrial facility has a duty to manage asbestos. A necessary part of that process involves having a survey carried out, and the materials tested and analysed.

perspective, the Control of Asbestos Regulations 2006 stipulates that any company offering air testing and bulk sample analysis work must be accredited to ISO 17025, which is the standard for the general competence of testing and calibration laboratories. Consequently, Redhill Analysts has held and maintained continuous accreditation since 1990, otherwise we simply wouldn't be able to work in this area."

EXCEEDING EXPECTATIONS

Aside from any legal requirements, there are sound business reasons for choosing to become accredited. Accreditation offers market differentiation and shows credible evidence of best practice, which can help win new business. Consequently, in addition having its testing and analysis work accredited, Redhill's asbestos inspection activities are accredited to ISO17020.

Although accreditation to this standard is not yet mandatory, Redhill saw that the additional customer confidence gained from being accredited had a positive impact on the business. Robert Blackburn said. "We have found that the process of accreditation has led to excellent control of the services we offer. This is essential in an industry dedicated to the eradication of the long legacy of the harmful effects of asbestos and provides comfort to clients who depend on our services to protect their staff and workplaces."

Laboratory Products Focus

TESTING TIMES

Since its launch in 1986, Redhill Analysts has been at the forefront of the asbestos consulting industry. Redhill Analysts has recently opened three regional offices across the UK, which combined with its head office in Surrey, enables it to offer nationwide coverage of its asbestos consultancy services. These services cover the entire range of asbestos related activity, from initial inspection and air testing, to sample analysis and the removal of hazardous material.



Accreditation of its services by UKAS has played an important part in the establishment and development of the business, as Robert Blackburn, Chairman of Redhill Analysis illustrates. "Working within the asbestos industry, one of the most regulated industries in the UK, UKAS accreditation is essential. From a legal

Achieving accredited status can make a laboratory a more attractive proposition to clients. Blackburn continues. "Accurate measurements and tests help to control costs by limiting product failure and downtime. Our clients gain from the security of knowing that they will have accurate and assured results from our laboratory, surveyors and analysts. Comfort is derived from knowing that every aspect of our technical performance is scrutinised by an independent third party." Using accredited services can also play a vital part in risk management. In the event of legal action, the use of accredited bodies to carry out independent evaluations helps demonstrate due diligence.

WORKING TOGETHER

Rather than being a burden on the business, the accreditation process can actually act as an enabler in helping it to become a more efficient and modern organisation. Blackburn said. "We have been fortunate to have had excellent UKAS assessors to audit our systems and procedures. These assessors have also provided invaluable guidance on how best to tackle issues that are faced through almost two decades of accreditation and our continued expansion as a business. The depth and breadth of their experience has, and continues, to be an essential part of our developing these systems."

Blackburn sees the relationship between Redhill and UKAS as more of a partnership than a traditional supplier/client relationship. Adopting this approach has allowed Redhill to take a step back from concentrating on the day to day business of testing and analysis. It has provided the opportunity to closely examine the procedures and systems it has in place, streamline processes and respond to change more efficiently. He concluded. "UKAS has helped our managers to deal with issues as they arise and provide guidance as circumstances change. We have gained immeasurably from this relationship and this positive attitude has given our staff both confidence in the way the business is run and pride in the work they do."

Author Details:

Jon Murthy
UKAS Marketing Manager
21-47 High Street, Feltham,
Middlesex TW13 4UN
www.ukas.com