

A legal claim brought by serving and former Royal Marines and British Army personnel over alleged exposure to asbestos during training in Latvia has been **settled without any admission of liability by the Ministry of Defence**.

The case arose from exercises Saber Strike (SS18) in 2018 and Baltic Protector (BP19) 2019 at **Skrunda-1**, a former secret Soviet radar base and military town which was subsequently taken over by the Latvian military and used for urban warfare training.

According to claimants, they expressed concern over the dust in the ageing disused building which they were allocated as sleeping accommodation. Permission was requested to sleep in a tent outside but this was refused. It's claimed that the personnel were later told to lay down boards to stop the dust from being disturbed.

A marine took a sample of the dust which on testing was found to contain Chrysotile fibre, a white loose material formerly used in pipe insulation and corrugated roofs.

More than 250 personnel became involved in legal action after concerns that they had been exposed to asbestos. A subsequent Defence Safety Authority investigation identified shortcomings in the assessment and management of environmental health risks associated with training at the site.

It is said that military planners knew about the likely presence of asbestos, but had relied on allies to avoid the use of affected parts of the site. Canadian authorities were also aware of the problem and had banned any use of the Skrunda-1 site by their forces, as is the case belatedly for UK personnel.

It is worth stressing that this was **not a case about exposure in the distant past**, when asbestos was routinely used in warships, military buildings and elsewhere and its dangers were much less well understood. The alleged exposure at Skrunda-1 occurred as recently as 2018 and 2019 – by which time the risks from asbestos had of course been recognised for decades.

Settlement without admission of liability means that the disputed issues have not been determined by a court. Nevertheless, the case is a useful reminder that realistic military training, including the use of old and derelict buildings, needs to be accompanied by effective assessment and management of environmental hazards.

Further reading: [BBC News – Royal Marines asbestos case](#)