

Primary eye care estate - note on reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC)

Produced by FODO – the Association for Eye Care Providers supported by ABDO and AOP

Primary eye care practice owners have asked for information on RAAC in the context of a typical optical practice setting. This note provides a summary of advice from respected organisations including the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), the Institute for Structural Engineers (IStructE) and Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS). If you have any further questions, please email your membership body, details below.

What is RAAC?

Reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC) is a type of lightweight concrete. It was used in some buildings from the mid-50s to the mid-90s, typically in roofs but also in floor and wall panels. While it was used in different building types, it is more likely to have been used in public buildings, e.g. hospitals, schools etc. [1].

What is the concern?

RAAC is not as durable as other concrete building materials [1]. There is a risk it can fail.

Its lifespan is less of a risk factor if it has been well maintained. The risk of failure increases if RAAC is exposed to water damage, thermal degradation or if there was an issue with the original formulation or installation [1].

What action is being taken?

The Construction Industry Council (CIC) is working with government to assess and advise on how to manage the risk associated with RAAC.

What should I do?

1. Many optical practices will not have concrete in their structure. If this applies to your practice you do not need to take any specific action.
2. Many practices are based in shopping centres or similar facilities. Your landlord should be in touch if there is RAAC that requires an intervention. You should also ask your landlord for an update.
3. Practices which do have concrete are likely still to have building plans and these might help identify whether RAAC was used. If your building plan or architect can confirm RAAC was not used,¹ you should document this, and further action should not be necessary.

¹ It is important to note an alternative name might be recorded for RAAC so you should not use "RAAC" as a search term. For example RICS explains that "certain product names such as Siporex, Durox, Celcon, Hebel and Ytong are indicators of RAAC." [1]

4. If you or your business owns the freehold of your practice property, you / your business will be responsible for ensuring compliance.
5. If your business holds your practice property on lease, whilst the freeholder is ultimately responsible for the building, the extent of the business's responsibility will depend upon the detailed terms of the lease.
6. If the above do not apply, then RICS advises the public against self-assessment of RAAC. This is because the material itself can be difficult to identify and it can also be difficult to detect defects. RICS therefore advises that, if you are unsure whether your building includes RAAC, you should seek advice from a qualified professional - e.g. a registered surveyor.
7. If you do need such advice, RICS advises that you use a regulated professional body for example [RICS](#) and/or [IStructE](#) to check that the person is suitably qualified [1].

What is the health service doing?

In England, NHS England has advised ICBs to seek assurance about the primary care estate, for example "confirmation that no RAAC has been identified or, where it has, confirmation that RAAC management plans are sufficiently robust and being implemented [2]. The Scottish and Welsh Governments also signpost to StructE RAAC guidance [3,4]

Disclaimer

NB This note alerts optical business and practice owners about RAAC, whether and how to seek help and what the NHS regulatory responses are so far. It does not comprise legal or technical guidance about handling RAAC on which members should seek appropriate professional advice from a suitably qualified person as at paragraph 7 above.

Membership body contact details

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References

[1] RAAC: Advice and FAQs, 12 Dec 2023, <https://www.rics.org/news-insights/current-topics-campaigns/raac-advice-and-faqs> accessed 13 December 2023

[2] NHS England, Reinforced aerated autoclaved concrete (RAAC), <https://www.england.nhs.uk/long-read/reinforced-aerated-autoclaved-concrete-raac/>

[3] Scottish Government, Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC): Cross Sector Working Group <https://www.gov.scot/groups/reinforced-autoclaved-aerated-concrete-cross-sector-working-group/>

[4] Welsh Government, Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC): frequently asked questions <https://www.gov.wales/reinforced-autoclaved-aerated-concrete-raac-frequently-asked-questions>

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