Statewide Strategic Plan for the Safe Management of Asbestos in Queensland
2014–2019
Foreword

The Statewide Strategic Plan for the Safe Management of Asbestos in Queensland 2014-2019 is a key government initiative to protect the Queensland community from risks associated with exposure to asbestos fibres.

The Queensland Government is committed to improving asbestos safety and will continue to work with local governments, industry, workers, organisations advocating asbestos safety and the wider community to achieve this.

The Queensland Government supports a coordinated whole-of-government approach towards the management of asbestos. This plan provides an integrated and strategic direction for the regulation and management of asbestos in Queensland and outlines the following priority areas:

- minimising the risk of exposure to asbestos
- seamless and integrated government service delivery
- community education and awareness about asbestos.

Asbestos-related diseases affect thousands of Australians. We must continue to work together to ensure people are aware of the risks arising from exposure to asbestos and know how to reduce those risks.

The Honourable Jarrod Bleijie MP
Attorney-General and Minister for Justice
The Queensland Government has a comprehensive regulatory framework to minimise the risks of exposure to asbestos in workplaces, domestic premises and the natural environment. These laws are administered by four state government departments and 73 local councils. Other state government agencies are also involved in the management of asbestos or responding to asbestos-related incidents.

The Queensland Government is committed to improving asbestos safety and supports a coordinated whole-of-government approach towards the management and regulation of asbestos.

Workplace Health and Safety Queensland (WHSQ) in the Department of Justice and Attorney-General (DJAG) is the lead agency for the strategic coordination of asbestos regulation and management and, where necessary, incident response.

WHSQ has developed the *Statewide Strategic Plan for the Safe Management of Asbestos in Queensland 2014-2019* in collaboration with other government departments with asbestos-related responsibilities and representatives of local councils.

This plan focuses on the following priority areas:
- minimising the risk of exposure to asbestos
- seamless and integrated government service delivery
- community education and awareness about asbestos.

Where there is alignment, initiatives in this plan will complement or link with the *National Strategic Plan for Asbestos Awareness and Management 2013-2018*.

**Aim**

The aim of this plan is to provide a strategic and coordinated approach to the regulation and management of asbestos in Queensland to minimise the risk of exposure to asbestos fibres at workplaces, domestic premises and in the natural environment.

**About asbestos**

Asbestos was mined and manufactured into a wide range of asbestos containing materials which were commonly used in residential, commercial and industrial buildings and structures between the 1940s and late 1980s. Phasing out of asbestos containing materials in construction began in the mid-1980s and as a result, building materials made after 1990 are unlikely to contain asbestos. The use of all forms of asbestos was banned nationally from 31 December 2003.

In Queensland, asbestos containing materials were used extensively in construction due to its relatively low cost and suitability to the Queensland climate. Examples of products containing asbestos include asbestos cement sheeting, asbestos cement pipes and gutters, asbestos backed vinyl flooring, gaskets and insulation material used in fire doors.
Health risks from exposure to asbestos

Asbestos is a known carcinogen. Asbestos can pose a health risk when fibres of a respirable size become airborne, are inhaled in sufficient concentration, and reach deep into the lungs in sufficient quantities. The possible health effects of asbestos include:

- asbestosis
- lung cancer
- mesothelioma
- benign pleural disease.

Asbestos-related diseases usually take many years to develop. The risk of developing an asbestos-related disease increases in proportion to the number of asbestos fibres breathed in over a lifetime.

The belief that ‘one fibre can kill’ is not supported by scientific evidence. Asbestos is widespread in the environment at very low levels due to asbestos fibre release from natural sources and extensive industrial and commercial use of asbestos in the past. The burden of asbestos fibres in the lungs appears to be well tolerated in most people, which is contrary to the belief that one fibre kills. In studies of lungs of people aged 60 to 79 years who had not died from asbestos-related disease, up to one million fibres per gram of dry lung tissue were measured.

The belief that one fibre can kill underpins fear and anxiety about asbestos exposure. Except in cases of high occupational exposure, the incidence of asbestos-related disease is very low. Occasional exposures to low concentrations of asbestos fibres, for example from house fires or renovation work on a neighbouring property, are likely to be associated with very low or negligible health risks.

Due to its widespread use in the past, asbestos containing materials still exist in many buildings and other places. Where the asbestos containing material is broken or disturbed, fibres can become loose and airborne and create a risk to health.

In the past, occupational exposure to asbestos fibres usually occurred while people were mining asbestos, manufacturing asbestos containing products or working with those products in industries such as construction, power generation and water treatment.

Currently, potential exposure to risk from asbestos fibres is mainly through the maintenance, removal, renovation and demolition of commercial buildings and residential homes where asbestos containing materials were installed before 1990. As a consequence, a broad range of trade-based occupations may now be potentially exposed to risk from asbestos fibres if removal or disturbance of the asbestos is not carried out safely.

It is anticipated that in the short to medium term, this trend in the risk of exposure to asbestos will continue and include home owners and their families as a result of do-it-yourself home renovations.

Managing the risk of exposure

Exposure to asbestos fibres can occur when existing asbestos containing materials are disturbed. This type of exposure can arise from unsafe removal techniques, maintenance or renovation type work (such as drilling and surface preparation) where poor or inadequate controls are in place to prevent the release of asbestos fibres.

Where the asbestos containing material is in good condition and left undisturbed, it is unlikely that significant concentrations of asbestos fibres will be released into the air and the risk to health is extremely low. Removal of asbestos containing material from homes and workplaces should only occur if the material is in poor condition, likely to sustain damage or during renovations. Work health and safety legislation has requirements about removing asbestos containing material before contractors carry out demolition or refurbishment work.
Asbestos removal must be carried out safely by people with appropriate training, supervision, equipment and, in some circumstances, with the relevant asbestos removal licence or certificate. A removal licence is not required where a person is removing 10m² or less of non-friable asbestos containing material at a workplace, however safety precautions still need to be taken to minimise the release of asbestos fibres.

Roles and responsibilities of state government departments and local councils in relation to the regulation and management of asbestos in Queensland

There are four state government departments and 73 local councils with legislative responsibilities for asbestos:

- **Work health and safety legislation** regulates the management, control and removal of asbestos in the workplace (including residential premises which are a 'workplace' when work is undertaken by a contractor). WHSQ in DJAG administers this legislation. In the case of workplaces that are mining leases, asbestos standards are administered by the Department of Natural Resources and Mines.

- **Transport of 250kgs or more of asbestos by a homeowner** – DEHP

- **Transport of any amount of asbestos by a contractor** – DEHP

- **Landfills** – DEHP and local councils

- **Illegal dumping** – Local councils and DEHP

- **All licensed removal work and asbestos assessors** – WHSQ

- **At a workplace not requiring licensed removal contractors** – WHSQ

- **At a domestic premises by a person conducting a business or undertaking** – WHSQ

- **All other cases at a domestic premises** – Local councils

- **Transport and disposal**

- **Emergency response**

- **In situ management**

- **Removal**
environmental protection and waste legislation regulates the transportation of commercial and industrial waste; the licensing of disposal facilities (such as landfills); and notification and remediation of contaminated land. The Department of Environment and Heritage Protection (DEHP) administers this legislation, with some powers delegated or devolved to local councils.

mining and quarrying legislation regulates the risks posed by naturally occurring asbestos that may be exposed during mining processes within the mining and quarrying industries and asbestos materials installed in buildings and plant on mine sites. This legislation is administered by the Department of Natural Resources and Mines (DNRM).

The following table summarises Queensland’s asbestos-related legislation and the responsible agencies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responsibility</th>
<th>Legislation</th>
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</table>
| Workplace Health and Safety Queensland, Department of Justice and Attorney-General | Work Health and Safety Act 2011  
Work Health and Safety Regulation 2011 |
| Department of Health and local councils | Public Health Act 2005  
Public Health Regulation 2005 |
| Department of Environment and Heritage Protection (with some powers delegated to local councils) | Environmental Protection Act 1994  
Environmental Protection Regulation 2008  
Environmental Protection (Waste Management) Regulation 2000  
Waste Reduction and Recycling Act 2011 |
| Department of Natural Resources and Mines | Mining and Quarrying Safety and Health Act 1999  
Coal Mining Safety and Health Act 1999  
Mining and Quarrying Safety and Health Regulation 2001  
Coal Mining Safety and Health Regulation 2001 |
Implementing the plan

WHSQ will take the lead in providing strategic oversight for the implementation of this plan to ensure the safe management of asbestos issues in Queensland, including interagency cooperation on operational asbestos issues and identifying the lead response agency when particular asbestos-related incidents occur. However, departments and local councils will remain responsible for carrying out their regulatory functions and operational activities for public health, work health and safety and environmental protection.

WHSQ will be supported by the Interagency Asbestos Group (IAG). The purpose of the IAG is to work cooperatively to achieve a coordinated and systematic approach to the management of asbestos in Queensland.

The IAG is chaired by the Deputy Director-General, Office of Fair and Safe Work Queensland, DJAG. It consists of senior representatives from the following agencies with a role in the regulation, enforcement and/or management of asbestos in Queensland:

- Workplace Health and Safety Queensland, DJAG
- Department of Health
- Department of Natural Resources and Mines
- Department of Environment and Heritage Protection
- Department of Housing and Public Works
- Department of Premier and Cabinet
- Local Government Association of Queensland

**Priority areas for action**

The aim of this plan is to provide a strategic and coordinated approach to the regulation and management of asbestos in Queensland to minimise the risk of exposure to asbestos fibres at workplaces, residential premises and in the natural environment. Three priority areas have been identified to achieve this aim.

1. **Minimising the risk of exposure to asbestos**
   This priority aims to ensure there are robust and effective regulatory controls for asbestos throughout its life cycle. It also aims to ensure there are adequate regulatory tools available to enforce compliance with asbestos laws.

2. **Seamless and integrated government service delivery**
   This priority aims to ensure there is effective coordination, cooperation and communication between the government agencies managing each part of the asbestos life cycle, and clarity about each agency's responsibilities. It also aims to provide an effective framework to deal with complex incidents and natural disasters that may require the attention and resources of a number of agencies.

3. **Community education and awareness about asbestos**
   This priority aims to ensure there is accurate, clear and consistent information for the community about asbestos, its associated health risks and how to minimise exposure to risk. This will be achieved by working with a range of community and stakeholder groups to improve education and awareness about asbestos.
## Priority 1

### Minimising the risk of exposure to asbestos

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Initiative</th>
<th>Responsibility</th>
<th>Timeframe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ensuring a robust and effective licensing regime</strong></td>
<td>1. Review the effectiveness of the licensing framework in the national model work health and safety laws.</td>
<td>WHSQ</td>
<td>December 2015</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2. Continue to strengthen the administration of asbestos licensing under work health and safety laws including a process for suspending or cancelling an asbestos licence where a licence holder contravenes the legislation.</td>
<td>WHSQ</td>
<td>June 2014</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3. Create a public online register of WHS asbestos licence holders where the public can easily check licensing and compliance records of contractors who work with asbestos.</td>
<td>WHSQ</td>
<td>June 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Review the current regime for the transport and disposal of asbestos by contractors and homeowners to determine whether it is a disincentive to the proper disposal of asbestos waste.</td>
<td>DEHP</td>
<td>July 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Monitor the effectiveness of the homeowner certification process to remove more than 10m$^2$ of non-friable asbestos from a dwelling and to strengthen compliance.</td>
<td>DoH</td>
<td>September 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ensure compliance and control of risks</strong></td>
<td>6. Carry out targeted and coordinated compliance programs to ensure compliance with asbestos laws.</td>
<td>WHSQ, DEHP, DoH</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
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<td></td>
<td>7. Review the suitability of existing fines and enforcement tools available to WHS inspectors to deal with asbestos in workplaces.</td>
<td>WHSQ</td>
<td>September 2015</td>
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<td></td>
<td>8. Review and take steps to address the adequacy of enforcement tools available under the Public Health Act and any factors impeding the ability to take enforcement action under the Public Health Act.</td>
<td>DoH</td>
<td>September 2015</td>
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<td></td>
<td>9. Develop and maintain the capacity of WHS inspectors and council officers to ensure they have a high level of skills, knowledge and confidence to deal with asbestos matters.</td>
<td>Agencies with enforcement responsibilities</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
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<td></td>
<td>10. Develop and communicate an agreed government position on the health risks associated with asbestos and asbestos containing material, including the risk posed by low density board.</td>
<td>IAG</td>
<td>September 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reducing illegal dumping</strong></td>
<td>11. Work with local councils to ensure there are adequate facilities in each local government area to enable homeowners and contractors to dispose of asbestos waste safely and lawfully.</td>
<td>IAG</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
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<td></td>
<td>12. Publish a register of sites in Queensland that accept asbestos waste.</td>
<td>IAG</td>
<td>May 2014</td>
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# Priority 2

## Seamless and integrated service delivery

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Initiative</th>
<th>Responsibility</th>
<th>Timeframe</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clear roles and responsibilities of agencies</td>
<td>13. Develop a protocol with local councils to assign responsibility for managing the response, clean-up and costs of asbestos incidents where the responsible party is not immediately identifiable or is unable or unwilling to carry out the necessary clean-up activities.</td>
<td>WHSQ, DoH, DEHP, local councils</td>
<td>July 2015</td>
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<td></td>
<td>14. Develop and provide clear advice to all relevant WHSQ and DoH officers about the precise limits of each agency's jurisdiction in relation to the management and enforcement of asbestos.</td>
<td>WHSQ, DoH</td>
<td>July 2014</td>
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<td></td>
<td>15. Reach agreement on which agency has responsibility for clearing up illegal dumping in specific situations and develop a formal mechanism for passing information between agencies about possible illegal dumping or improper transport of asbestos.</td>
<td>IAG</td>
<td>June 2015</td>
</tr>
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<td>Effective ways to deal with complex incidents and natural disasters</td>
<td>16. Finalise the multiagency asbestos incident response protocol and provide clear guidance to all relevant agencies on: • which agency has primary responsibility for responding to asbestos issues relating to incidents and natural disasters • how agencies will coordinate their response efforts • particular issues of confusion that may arise regarding the jurisdiction of agencies.</td>
<td>IAG</td>
<td>June 2014</td>
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<td>17. Ensure there are mechanisms within local disaster management plans to identify responsibility for asbestos issues and communication with the public about asbestos risks during natural disasters.</td>
<td>IAG</td>
<td>June 2014</td>
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## Priority 3

### Community education and awareness about asbestos

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Targeted area</th>
<th>Initiatives</th>
<th>Responsibility</th>
<th>Timeframe</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improved community access to information</td>
<td>18. Provide information about asbestos to local councils to ensure their websites have accurate, consistent and comprehensive information.</td>
<td>IAG, local councils</td>
<td>December 2014</td>
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<td></td>
<td>19. Develop accurate, consistent and comprehensive information to clearly explain each agency’s role and legislation in relation to asbestos and provide this on the single portal asbestos website.</td>
<td>IAG with all other agencies</td>
<td>June 2014</td>
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<td></td>
<td>20. Enhance the new whole-of-government single portal website for asbestos until it becomes the primary site for access to information on asbestos issues for the public and the asbestos removal industry in Queensland.</td>
<td>IAG with all other agencies</td>
<td>September 2014</td>
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| Improved public awareness of asbestos related matters | 21. Develop a whole-of-government communication strategy that uses identifiable ‘trigger points’ to communicate information about asbestos before exposure to asbestos occurs. The strategy will include:  
- promoting the single portal asbestos website and hotline to relevant agencies, stakeholders and the public  
- working with agencies and local councils to ensure the website and hotline are advertised on all agency and council websites relating to asbestos.  
- clear linkages to agency-specific communication strategies and asbestos plans  
- publishing information on high priority areas - natural disasters, house fires, demolition, removal, maintenance, renovations  
- developing mechanisms/processes to provide information at appropriate ‘trigger points’ when people are likely to encounter asbestos.                                                                 | IAG                       | December 2014 |
|                               | 22. Develop a suite of safe work procedures to demonstrate how asbestos can be safely managed for certain high risk tasks.                                                                                      | WHSQ                     | Ongoing       |
|                               | 23. Undertake coordinated awareness campaigns for high priority groups including removalists, tradespeople, renovators, rental property tenants and owner builders.                                                   | IAG with participation by agencies relevant to target audience | Ongoing       |
|                               | 24. Collaborate with relevant bodies and community organisations to identify further ways to increase awareness of asbestos safety in Queensland.                                                                    | IAG                       | Ongoing       |
|                               | 25. Increase awareness in the asbestos industry about the requirement to hold both a regulated waste transport licence and a waste transport certificate for transporting asbestos.                                         | DEHP                     | Ongoing       |
|                               | 26. Work with remote, discrete Indigenous communities to facilitate awareness about asbestos issues through the established forum of technical working groups.                                                     | DATSIMA and other agencies as required | Ongoing       |
The Statewide Strategic Plan for the Safe Management of Asbestos in Queensland 2014-2019 is a five year plan. The initiatives in this plan are intended to protect the long-term future health of Queenslanders. As a result, the real impact of this plan may not be evident for many years. However, the government will monitor and evaluate the success of these initiatives. This plan will be reviewed annually by the IAG to ensure the priorities and initiatives outlined in the plan remain relevant.

Each agency represented on the IAG with responsibilities under the plan will report annually to WHSQ on their performance under the plan.

The Attorney-General and Minister for Justice will report to government on progress under the plan. This will be coordinated by the Department of Justice and Attorney-General in consultation with the IAG.

Annual progress reports will also be made available on the government’s asbestos website at: asbestos.qld.gov.au.

### Acronyms/abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>DATSIMA</td>
<td>Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Multicultural Affairs</td>
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<td>DEHP</td>
<td>Department of Environment and Heritage Protection</td>
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<tr>
<td>DHPW</td>
<td>Department of Housing and Public Works</td>
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<tr>
<td>DJAG</td>
<td>Department of Justice and Attorney-General</td>
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<td>DNRM</td>
<td>Department of Natural Resources and Mines</td>
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<tr>
<td>DoH</td>
<td>Department of Health</td>
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<td>IAG</td>
<td>Interagency Asbestos Group</td>
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<td>LGAQ</td>
<td>Local Government Association of Queensland</td>
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<td>WHSQ</td>
<td>Workplace Health and Safety Queensland</td>
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