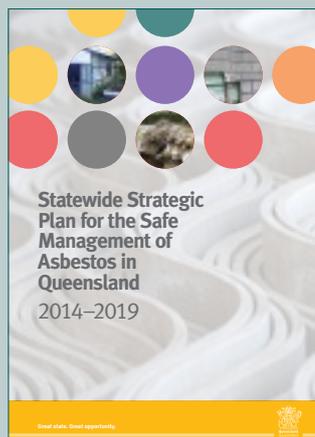


Asbestos strategy report card two

2015

Asbestos strategy



The Queensland Government is delivering a coordinated approach to the regulation and management of asbestos through the *Statewide Strategic Plan for the Safe Management of Asbestos in Queensland 2014-2019* (asbestos strategy).

The asbestos strategy sets out initiatives which fall under the priority areas of:

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

The asbestos strategy is supported by a Multiagency Asbestos Incident Response Protocol, which sets out how state government agencies and local councils with responsibilities for asbestos will respond to and manage asbestos incidents.

Together, the asbestos strategy and protocol reduce gaps in government agency responses and improve education and awareness about asbestos, leading to better health and safety outcomes for Queensland.

The Interagency Asbestos Group, which has representatives from relevant state government agencies and local councils, provides strategic oversight of asbestos issues, incident response and linking asbestos services across government.

This is the second progress report under the asbestos strategy.

Seamless and integrated government service delivery

Local councils are authorised under the *Public Health Act 2005* to respond to asbestos complaints in non-workplace areas. In the past, local councils experienced difficulties in meeting these responsibilities due to concerns about insurance coverage and resources, and generally referred non-workplace asbestos-related matters to Queensland Health for a response.

State government action to address local council concerns over 2014-2015 included:

- Providing a legislated indemnity for local council officers under the *Public Health Act 2005*. The indemnity transfers civil liability for any asbestos-related harm arising from local council officers performing asbestos-related responsibilities in good faith and without gross negligence, from local councils to the state government.
- Delivering training about asbestos to local council officers. Between October 2014 and May 2015, Workplace Health and Safety Queensland and the Department of Health delivered 17 face-to-face training sessions to over 380 local council officers in 14 locations across Queensland to equip them for the role of enforcing the asbestos provisions in the *Public Health Act 2005*. The three day training course provided comprehensive information about:
 - the role of local councils under the *Public Health Act 2005* as well as ways to control the health risks posed by asbestos
 - interaction with the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011* and other relevant legislation
 - roles and responsibilities of enforcement agencies in Queensland.

The training also provided an opportunity for participants to gain practical skills and network with other regulators.

The state government has also committed to providing ongoing training to council officers to ensure appropriate levels of trained staff are maintained.

- Establishing a reimbursement scheme for priority asbestos-related clean-up work. The state government has allocated

up to \$400 000 per year to support councils in recovering reasonable costs associated with asbestos-related clean-up work which meets certain criteria.



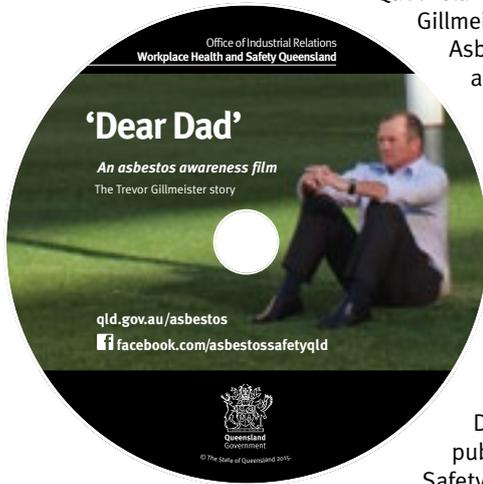
Supporting local councils to gain the necessary competency to enforce asbestos regulations in domestic settings has been a key step to ensuring there is a consistent and effective response to asbestos incidents in the community.

Health and safety regulator networks have also been established across Queensland to improve communication and collaboration between regulatory agencies, including local councils responsible for managing asbestos in the community.

There are other chemical, industrial and biological hazard areas subject to regulation by more than one agency that would benefit from a coordinated approach to regulation and management across government, such as dangerous goods and agricultural spray drift. The health and safety regulator networks have the potential to be expanded in the future to include a broader range of hazard areas, and other relevant agencies will be invited to participate as needed.



Community education and awareness about asbestos



Queensland rugby league legend Trevor Gillmeister has continued in his role as Asbestos Awareness Ambassador, and has helped spread important messages about asbestos safety throughout industry and the community. In October 2014, Trevor walked from Townsville to Brisbane to raise public awareness about the dangers of asbestos and funds for the Asbestos Related Diseases Support Society Queensland. He also appears in the short film 'Dear Dad: An asbestos awareness film', published by Workplace Health and Safety Queensland, and talks about the impact on his family of losing his father to mesothelioma.

Other key community awareness activities include:

- encouraging hardware stores and local councils to distribute Queensland government resources to the community about asbestos, its health risks and how to minimise exposure
- providing businesses that supply, hire or use high pressure water equipment with warning tags to attach to the equipment to remind operators not to use the equipment on asbestos containing material
- distributing information to homeowners at the Brisbane Home Show in March and August 2015 on how to minimise the risk of exposure to asbestos
- sharing key messages about asbestos safety at Safe Work Month events in October 2014 and October 2015 and supporting Asbestos Awareness Week in November 2014 and Asbestos Awareness Month in November 2015
- publishing new resources on the whole-of-government website for asbestos, including a training outline that will assist trade employers such as plumbers and electricians to provide appropriate safety training to their workers conducting asbestos-related work and small amounts of non-licensed asbestos removal work.

Jurisdictions around Australia are working together to improve awareness around the prohibition on importing goods or materials that contain asbestos into Australia, and respond efficiently when imported products have been identified as containing asbestos.

The Rapid Response Protocol, developed by the Heads of Workplace Safety Authorities, enables government agencies to work cooperatively when such a situation occurs, and ensures a nationally uniform compliance and enforcement approach can be taken in response to these incidents.

The Rapid Response Protocol was triggered in September 2015 and effectively allowed regulators around the country to take a coordinated approach to removing imported crayons that contained asbestos from sale.

Asbestos investigation in Gaythorne and Newstead

A multi-agency investigation led by Queensland Health was undertaken to assess whether there were any asbestos-related health risks to residents living in proximity to former asbestos products manufacturing factories in Gaythorne and Newstead, Brisbane.

To ensure a comprehensive and structured approach, the investigation encompassed literature review, epidemiological study, site history record study, asbestos monitoring program and community engagement. This was necessary to account for the long latency period for asbestos related diseases.

Air monitoring conducted in the area showed there is no greater risk of exposure to asbestos fibres to local residents than for people living in other areas of Brisbane. The investigation concluded that all houses tested were safe to occupy with no further action required.

In addition, while there is likely to have been asbestos exposure in the vicinity of the former factories while they were operational (pre-1980), the investigation revealed that there is no evidence of elevated asbestos-related health risk to residents who have lived near the former factory sites in Gaythorne and Newstead since the mid-1980's following the clean-up of the sites.

The investigation highlighted several issues. Recommendations have been made to:

- improve safe disposal of small quantities of asbestos waste by the public
- provide appropriate management strategies to residents in areas where buried asbestos may be extensively present under private property
- undertake further education and awareness activities promoting safe handling of asbestos containing materials.

These recommendations will be referred to the Interagency Asbestos Group to ensure a coordinated and systematic approach to the management of these issues.





Minimising the risk of exposure to asbestos

Workplace Health and Safety Queensland continues to maintain a robust and effective licensing system for asbestos removalists.

Inspectors carry out approximately 200 random audits on the work practices of licensed asbestos removalists each year. They also visit approximately 1000 workplaces every year to check compliance with requirements to maintain asbestos registers and management plans.

Where required, appropriate statutory direction is given to improve work practices. The information from the audits is also used to develop additional guidance for licensed removalists.

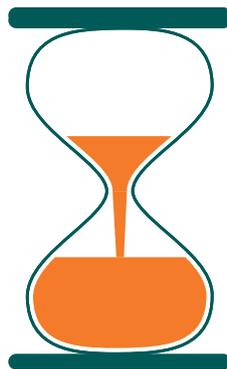
Workplace Health and Safety Queensland has also written to asbestos removal licence holders to encourage greater compliance with the requirement to notify the regulator before carrying out licensed asbestos removal work and to demonstrate their competency when renewing a licence.



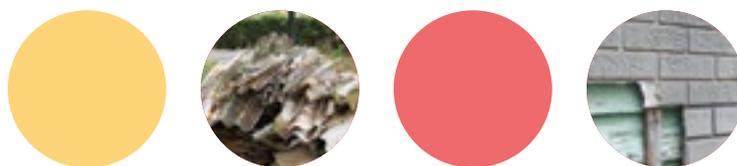
Future priorities

The future work program of the Interagency Asbestos Group in 2016 includes:

- working with relevant agencies and local councils to reduce illegal dumping through a trial project which enables homeowners to safely dispose of small quantities of asbestos waste
- considering how to appropriately manage and advise residents of the possible presence of large quantities of buried asbestos on their properties



- continuing to raise community awareness about safe handling of asbestos containing materials
- continuing to collaborate with local councils on managing asbestos under public health laws including sustainable options for ongoing training of local government officers to enforce asbestos laws under the *Public Health Act 2005*
- strengthening systems for better coordination of support and response to local councils to deal with major natural disasters involving asbestos building materials.



Disclaimer

The material presented in this publication is distributed by the Queensland Government as an information source only. The information and data in this publication are subject to change without notice. The Queensland Government makes no statements, representations, or warranties about the accuracy or completeness of, and you should not rely on, any information contained in this publication. The Queensland Government disclaims all responsibility and all liability (including without limitation liability in negligence) for all expenses, losses, damages and costs you might incur as a result of the information being inaccurate or incomplete in any way, and for any reason.

© Copyright State of Queensland 2015.

PN11922