



Asbestos strategy report card three **2016**

Asbestos strategy

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

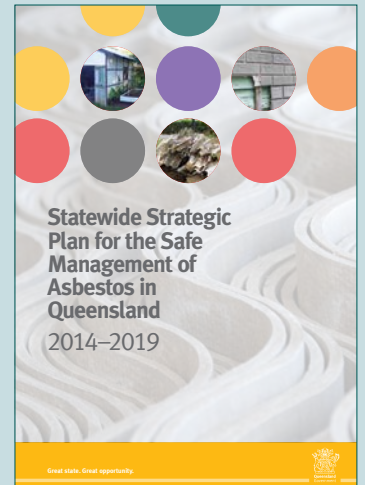
The asbestos strategy focusses on the following three priority areas to improve asbestos safety and support a cooperative whole-of-government approach:

- 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 outlines how state government agencies and local councils with responsibilities for asbestos will respond to and coordinate the management of asbestos incidents.

Together, the asbestos strategy and protocol reduce gaps in government agency responses and improve community awareness of the risks relating to asbestos exposure.

An Interagency Asbestos Group, which has representatives from relevant state government agencies and the Local Government Association of Queensland, provides strategic oversight of asbestos issues, incident response and links asbestos services across government.



Minimising the risk of exposure to asbestos

Workplace Health and Safety Queensland carries out regular and targeted compliance of the asbestos removal industry to ensure asbestos laws are being followed and enforced. In 2015-16, work health and safety inspectors carried out 342 audits on the work practices of licensed asbestos removalists. They also visited 730 workplaces to check asbestos registers and management plans were being maintained. The audits and workplace visits are important tools in ensuring that licensed asbestos removalists are engaging in safe work practices when dealing with asbestos.

In the past year, a two day intermediate level training course on asbestos compliance and enforcement has been delivered to Workplace Health and Safety Queensland's inspectors and advisors throughout the state. This has helped to ensure the inspectorate can effectively enforce asbestos laws.

When necessary, statutory intervention is used to improve work practices involving asbestos. In addition to issuing improvement, prohibition and infringement notices, Workplace Health and Safety Queensland can initiate prosecutions against businesses which fail to meet their legislative duties. Workplace Health and Safety Queensland has commenced a number of asbestos-related prosecutions, which highlight to the industry that a failure to use safe work practices when dealing with asbestos will not be tolerated.

Seamless and integrated government service delivery

The government has been working to ensure councils are equipped to respond to asbestos complaints and incidents in non-workplace areas. Councils are authorised under the *Public Health Act 2005* to manage asbestos in domestic settings.

In July 2015, the government launched a reimbursement scheme to support councils and agencies in recovering costs associated with asbestos related clean-up work which meets certain criteria. The government allocated \$400,000 each year for the recovery of reasonable costs to carry out urgent rectification works following an asbestos-related incident. The introduction of this scheme ensures councils are adequately equipped to respond to asbestos incidents in their local areas.

The establishment of eight Health and Safety Regulator Networks have helped to foster effective and positive relationships between Workplace Health and Safety Queensland and local governments and improve dialogue between councils when coordinating responses to an asbestos-related incident. A number of network meetings were held in 2016 to share ideas about how to improve the management of asbestos-related events.

Workplace Health and Safety Queensland, in collaboration with Queensland Health, is also continuing to conduct refresher training for local government Environmental Health Officers to ensure they have the appropriate competencies to respond to an asbestos-related incident. A webinar format has been used to deliver refresher training to Environmental Health Officers during 2016 about asbestos as a public health issue. The use of online technology such as webinars has been useful to reach regional and remote councils particularly in North Queensland.



Community education and awareness about asbestos

The government continues to focus on awareness strategies to ensure Queenslanders are mindful of the dangers associated with asbestos.

Rugby league legend Trevor Gillmeister continued his vital role as Asbestos Safety Ambassador, championing awareness across Queensland about asbestos and how to minimise exposure to it. Trevor's short film 'Dear Dad' detailed the devastating personal impact of losing a loved one to an asbestos-related disease. The film has been widely promoted through social media and can be viewed at qld.gov.au/asbestos.

Julie and Don Sager have also continued their role as asbestos safety advocates, sharing the story of their son Adam, who tragically lost his life to mesothelioma at 26 years of age.

Key education and awareness activities in 2016 included:

- raising awareness of asbestos safety at three Home Show events and a display at the Royal Queensland Show
- information sessions at hardware stores for young renovators and tradespeople and asbestos safety demonstrations for electrical apprentices
- supplying warning tags to businesses that sell, hire or use high pressure water equipment so they can be attached to equipment to remind operators not to use it on asbestos materials
- using Safe Work Month events in October 2016 to inform members of the public about asbestos safety, including a community breakfast in King George Square, Brisbane
- developing two films around working safely with asbestos for minor renovations and promoting how personal protective equipment is used when dealing with asbestos
- advertising and events for Asbestos Awareness Week in November 2016, supported by Luke and Cody Cook, winners of Channel 7's *House Rules*
- editorial, media and social media to keep people aware of asbestos risks. There has been nearly 170,000 views of the Government's asbestos website over the past year.



Future priorities

Asbestos disposal

A key priority for the Interagency Asbestos Group leading into 2017 will be working with councils to implement a public asbestos disposal pilot scheme. Currently, disposal at local landfill facilities can be restrictive as there are limited landfill sites that accept asbestos waste. Local councils also set their own fees for disposing of asbestos, which vary considerably across local government areas.

The pilot scheme aims to improve the way homeowners can dispose of small quantities of asbestos waste, including asbestos from minor renovation projects or scrap asbestos pieces found in yards. The Interagency Asbestos Group will be working with both metropolitan and regional councils to trial a number of options to determine effective methods of encouraging residents to dispose of small amounts of asbestos. This is anticipated to include trials in remote regions of Queensland where there are particularly unique challenges with the disposal of asbestos.

It is expected the pilot scheme will start in early 2017 in selected council areas for 12 months. Following this, a full evaluation of the scheme will be conducted to establish which disposal methods have worked well and led to an increase in the safe and proper disposal of household asbestos waste. The evaluation will also identify the benefits and savings achieved for councils such as operational efficiencies and consider successful case studies which could be adopted more broadly following the pilot scheme.





Improved system for asbestos removal notifications

Workplace Health and Safety Queensland is investigating ways to improve the notification process for licensed asbestos removal work. Work health and safety laws require licensed asbestos removalists to notify Workplace Health and Safety Queensland at least five days before they undertake asbestos removal work.

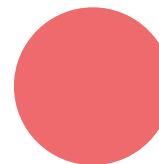
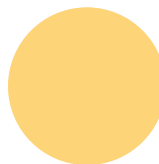
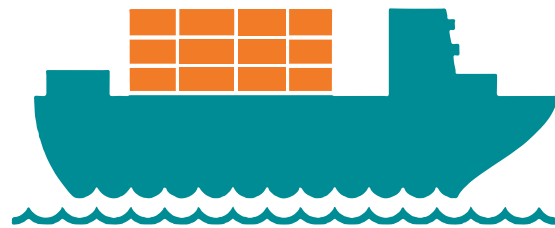
It is planned to develop technological improvements to the current notification system to provide a simpler and more efficient process for asbestos removalists. It is also proposed to make changes to enable councils to access the information from notifications so they are aware of asbestos removal work occurring in their local area.



Imported products containing asbestos

In 2017, the government will continue to actively engage with other states and territories regarding the issue of imported products and materials containing asbestos. Jurisdictions around Australia have been working together to deal with this issue and manage the risks associated with potential exposure. A Rapid Response Protocol, developed by the Heads of Workplace Safety Authorities, enables government agencies to work cooperatively when imported products have been identified as containing asbestos. The protocol ensures there is consistency in approaches to enforcement and information can be quickly shared.

The government will continue to play an active role under the protocol to ensure that imported products containing asbestos are swiftly and effectively managed to protect workers from the risks of exposure.



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