



## Asbestos strategy report card four

# 2017

The Statewide Strategic Plan for the Safe Management of Asbestos in Queensland 2014-2019 (the asbestos strategy) sets out the Queensland Government's commitment to:



improve community education and awareness about asbestos



provide seamless and coordinated government responses to asbestos related events



minimise the risk of exposure to asbestos.

With the asbestos strategy in its fourth year the Queensland Government has turned its attention to emerging risks including:



the rising number of home owners who may be exposed to asbestos during do-it-yourself (DIY) home renovations



the illegal importation of products that contain asbestos.



## Improving community education and awareness about asbestos

Efforts to improve homeowner and community awareness about asbestos continued in 2017, with a particular focus on renovators and DIYers. Key education and awareness activities included:

- information stands at the Brisbane Home Show, Royal Queensland Show and Safe Work Month events in King George Square, Brisbane
- Asbestos Awareness Week activities including displays at Bunnings locations and an asbestos community forum in Roma
- community awareness forums on preventing asbestos materials being imported and publication of alerts regarding the identification of asbestos in imported products
- new fact sheets on the use, maintenance and testing of H-class industrial vacuum cleaners and preventing goods containing asbestos being supplied to Queensland workplaces.

Queensland rugby league legend Trevor Gillmeister continued his role as Asbestos Safety Ambassador in 2017, attending community events to champion asbestos awareness. Julie and Don Sager also continued their roles as asbestos safety advocates, sharing the story of the tragic loss of their son Adam to mesothelioma in order to raise awareness about the risks posed by asbestos.



## Minimising the risk of exposure to asbestos

### Residential disposal of asbestos waste pilot

To ensure homeowners across Queensland have access to adequate facilities to dispose of asbestos waste safely and lawfully, the Interagency Asbestos Group is working with local councils to implement a residential asbestos waste disposal pilot scheme. The pilot scheme aims to improve the way homeowners can safely dispose of small quantities of asbestos waste, including asbestos from minor renovation projects or scrap asbestos pieces found in yards.

Five Queensland councils, varying in size and location, have been selected to participate in the pilot program. They will each trial one or more of the pilot scheme options:

- allowing residents to dispose of asbestos for free on a designated day at a landfill or transfer station
- providing a permanent or temporary skip bin for asbestos waste disposal at a landfill or transfer station

- providing asbestos disposal kits to homeowners needing to dispose of small quantities of asbestos waste
- reducing or waiving the fee charged for asbestos disposal at landfill or transfer stations.

The Queensland Government will work with councils to begin implementing the pilot in 2018. After a 12 month trial period, the pilot will be evaluated to identify which methods have been effective in enabling residents to safely dispose of asbestos waste, and the benefits gained by councils, to encourage their wider adoption across the state.

## Asbestos in government properties

Asbestos containing materials in public housing are managed by the Department of Housing and Public Works (DHPW). To control and manage the risk of exposure to asbestos to those who occupy and work on public housing, DHPW conducts routine inspections to monitor the condition of asbestos containing materials and alerts tenants and contractors to the presence of asbestos in a property by placing warning stickers in meter boxes and internal cupboard doors.

DHPW is also progressively removing asbestos from its properties as part of refurbishment and maintenance programs. These measures ensure that tenants who occupy government owned buildings that contain asbestos are not at risk of exposure.

## New legislation to make construction sites safer

The Queensland Government is leading the way nationally on addressing the issue of building products that are not of acceptable quality, do not meet Australian standards or are not fit for their intended purpose. On 1 November 2017, new laws<sup>1</sup> commenced which place greater responsibility on people in the building supply chain to ensure that building products are safe and fit for purpose. This includes ensuring that building products do not contain asbestos containing materials. The Queensland Building and Construction Commission now has the power to require remedial action be taken or prosecute for specific offences. These new laws will make construction sites safer for the workers involved, and ensure that finished products are safe for occupiers and end users.



## Compliance and enforcement activities by Workplace Health and Safety Queensland

In 2017, Workplace Health and Safety Queensland (WHSQ) bolstered its ability to enforce breaches of asbestos regulation by increasing the resourcing allocated to respond to asbestos issues.

WHSQ responded to ten high risk events in 2017, including six events where high pressure water was used to clean an asbestos roof, which caused a high risk of exposure to asbestos containing material. WHSQ officers coordinated and supervised the clean-up of asbestos debris to ensure it was properly removed and no further risk remained for the occupants of the affected properties. In addition to the health risks associated with these events, there are significant financial impacts involved in remediating properties, and penalties for breaching the Work Health and Safety Regulation 2011, shown in the table below. WHSQ comprehensively investigates each high risk event and applies fines and prosecution action where it is able to.



Event	Clean up cost	Fine/Prosecution
High pressure water used to clean asbestos roof on domestic premises	\$20,000	<b>Pending</b>
High pressure water used to clean asbestos roof on domestic premises	\$15,000	<b>Pending</b>
High pressure water used to clean asbestos roof on domestic premises	Unknown	<b>Pending</b>
High pressure water used to clean asbestos roof on domestic premises	\$2,000	<b>Fine \$420</b>
High pressure water used to clean asbestos roof on domestic premises	\$12,000	<b>Fine \$420</b>
High pressure water used to clean asbestos roof on domestic premises	\$12,000	<b>Pending</b>
Building demolished without removing asbestos materials	\$90,000	<b>\$720 on the spot fine Prosecution pending</b>
Building demolished and asbestos waste buried on site	To be determined	<b>Pending</b>
Abrasive blasting used to remove paint from asbestos containing material	\$37,000	<b>Fines totalling \$9,360</b>
Asbestos containing material removed inside a house without appropriate dust suppression	\$43,000	<b>Pending</b>

WHSQ also commenced a comprehensive assessment of licensed asbestos removalists who have been identified as having a history of poor asbestos removal practices. One licence has been cancelled and four others are being considered for cancellation or suspension. An ongoing program of assessing licensed removalists is planned for 2018, to ensure the community has confidence in the asbestos removalist licensing regime.

<sup>1</sup> Building and Construction Legislation (Non-conforming Building Products—Chain of Responsibility and Other Matters) Amendment Act 2017



## Providing seamless and coordinated government responses to asbestos

### Local council training and engagement

The Queensland Government and local councils continue to work together effectively to respond to asbestos related incidents in the community. WHSQ has provided training to additional council officers who are authorised to respond to asbestos complaints and incidents in Queensland homes. **In the last three years, over 500 council officers have been trained on asbestos risk management and enforcement.**

In addition, members from government agencies and all local councils participate in Health and Safety Regulator Networks across the State. These Networks allow members to effectively coordinate responses to asbestos issues, and regular meetings provide a forum for delivering refresher training on asbestos to council officers.



### Reimbursement scheme for priority asbestos related clean-up

The Asbestos Reimbursement Scheme (ARS) is a Queensland Government initiative to support local councils in the clean-up of asbestos debris in the interest of public health and safety. Councils can recover costs associated with cleaning up asbestos incidents which meet certain criteria. To date, one claim of \$88,130 (excluding GST) has been approved to reimburse the costs incurred by a local council in remediating a residential site following asbestos contamination of the area.

### Responding to imported asbestos products

WHSQ continued to work cooperatively with all other Australian State and Territory Work Health and Safety Regulators, the ACCC, the Australian Border Force and the Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency in 2017 to respond to imported products that contain asbestos. There were 10 cases in 2017 where WHSQ worked with businesses under the Rapid Response Protocol to ensure imported materials containing asbestos were removed from the supply chain in Queensland. These materials included:

- imported quad bikes
- electric scooters
- asbestos contaminated talc in paint
- motorbike brake shoes
- vintage car gaskets
- asbestos cement sheeting used for installation to walls
- bathroom tiles
- spa gaskets
- acetylene gas cylinders.



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