

Media Release

Mr Danny Pearson MP

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FIGHT TO PROTECT WORKERS FROM ASBESTOS NEVER ENDS

Two decades on from a landmark national ban on the use of asbestos, the Allan Labor Government is urging Victorian employers and tradespeople not to ignore the ongoing risk of exposure to the deadly material.

National Asbestos Awareness Week (20-27 November) marks the 20th anniversary of the prohibition on the use, importation and manufacture of asbestos.

Homes built in Australia until 1990 routinely used asbestos products such as cement sheeting and thermal insulation for pipes, and asbestos is estimated to still be present in one in three homes. When disturbed by demolition or construction, the consequences can be lethal.

Asbestos becomes a health risk when fibres are breathed into the lungs, which can cause diseases including mesothelioma, lung cancer and asbestosis. The effects of asbestos are often felt most in the years and even decades after being exposed to its fibres.

WorkSafe is conducting a fortnight-long blitz across the state focused on the safe removal of asbestos.

Inspectors will visit worksites reinforcing messages such as ensuring asbestos is identified prior to demolition, checking there are processes for workers to know where asbestos is likely to be found and what to do if it is, and ensuring any required asbestos removal is undertaken by a licensed removalist.

Australia has one of the highest incidence rates of mesothelioma in the world due to the widespread manufacture and use of the product in the decades prior to 2003.

More than 700 Australians are diagnosed with the incurable cancer every year and former fitter and machinist from Gippsland Brian Healy is one of their number. Mr Healy urged workers to speak up if they feel their workplace is not taking the risk of asbestos exposure seriously.

Employers can find guidance on their Occupational Health and Safety obligations relating to asbestos and tools to reduce the risk of exposure at [worksafe.vic.gov.au/asbestos](https://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/asbestos).

Quotes attributable to Minister for WorkSafe and the TAC Danny Pearson

"Asbestos was banned two decades ago but a significant amount of asbestos-containing material remains in many homes and other buildings."

"We're making sure businesses understand their responsibilities and workers know the black and white rules when it comes to safe demolition of materials that could contain asbestos."

Quotes attributable to mesothelioma sufferer, former fitter and machinist Brian Healy

"We were told to be careful of it, but given no explanation on why. The only one who's going to suffer later on down the track will be you if you don't look after yourself."

"When my GP said to me 'Brian, you have mesothelioma' my stomach sank because I knew exactly what it was. When I was walking out of the doctor's I'm thinking to myself, 'I knew it was going to happen'."

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