

Thursday, 16 August 2012

Report backs union calls to rid Australia of asbestos by 2030 and save 500 lives a year

A plan to make Australia asbestos-free by 2030 must start with government buildings, say unions following the release today of the report of two-year national inquiry into asbestos removal.

ACTU President Ged Kearney said unions welcomed the Government's release of the Asbestos Management Review's report and action must now be taken to get rid of the carcinogen.

"We are pleased the panel has agreed with calls made by Australian unions during the review, including a plan to make Australia an asbestos-free nation and put an end to the tragic deaths that continue each year as a result of contact with the carcinogen," Ms Kearney said.

"The panel, chaired by Geoff Fary, recommended the Government must investigate removing asbestos from Government and commercial buildings in the next 18 years, as well as set up an audit of its existence in residential properties built before production ended in 1987.

"In our submission to the review, we called for asbestos to be eliminated from all buildings by 2030. We believe this should start with Government-owned buildings.

"The review recommendations are a good start but unions will continue to lobby for its complete removal.

"The panel also agreed with unions' recommendation that a new national agency must be set up to oversee a strategic plan for asbestos awareness and management across Australia.

"Unions now call on the Government to implement the review panel's recommendations so that workers and families can feel safe in their workplaces and their homes."

More than 500 Australians die each year from the asbestos disease, mesothelioma, and these numbers are expected to increase over the next decade.

"Clearly the dangers of asbestos didn't end when we stopped mining asbestos, or fully banned its use in 2003," Ms Kearney said.

"Australia had one of the highest rates of asbestos consumption per head in the world, and most of that asbestos is still in place in buildings and is deteriorating.

"Every third domestic dwelling built before 1982 is thought to contain asbestos – that's more than a million houses. It is in our homes, our schools and hospitals and our workplaces.

"It is a silent killer, and a plan needs to be put in place to remove it from the built environment completely, starting with Government and commercial buildings, as recommended by the review panel."

Unions and victim support groups will discuss their own action plan for the removal of asbestos at a national summit in Sydney next month.

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