

Friday, 16 September 2011

## All buildings should be cleared of asbestos by 2030 to save future generations: unions

An Asbestos Safety Certificate should be required every time a residential property is sold or leased in order to protect future generations of Australians from asbestos diseases, say unions.

Under a proposal by the ACTU, properties would be audited for asbestos so that residents or buyers were fully-informed of any health risks.

It is estimated that more than a million houses in Australia contain asbestos, which was banned from production in 1988. More than 500 Australians die each year from the asbestos disease, mesothelioma, and these numbers are expected to increase over the next decade.

The proposal for an Asbestos Safety Certificate is in the ACTU's submission to the Commonwealth Government's Asbestos Management Review. It says all asbestos should be removed from the built environment by 2030.

"Unions have successfully campaigned to end the production and export of asbestos from Australia, and to obtain proper compensation for mesothelioma victims and their families," Ms Kearney said.

"But here we are in 2011, and the number of Australians dying from mesothelioma is on the rise, with a 10% rise in new cases to 660 recorded in the most recent statistics. It is simply unacceptable that more than two decades since the use of asbestos in construction was banned, we have growing numbers of people dying from its effects.

"Clearly the dangers to health from asbestos didn't end when we stopped mining asbestos or started to ban the use of asbestos in the 1980s, or when we stopped importing it in 2004.

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

"Every third domestic dwelling built in Australia 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.

"Workers in every sector have been affected. Even family members have lost their lives through exposure to asbestos brought home from the workplace. Today, home renovators make up the largest proportion of all non-work cases of mesothelioma and it is time we turned this around.

"That is why in our submission we have also called for a national audit of asbestos in buildings across the country, with priority on Government-owned buildings, as well as asbestos dump sites.

"A failure by our nation to deal comprehensively with ACMs would condemn future generations to continued death and suffering."

Other recommendations the ACTU made in its submission to the Government's review included:

- Establishment of a stand-alone National Asbestos Authority;
- Prioritised removal to get rid of asbestos, starting with Government-owned buildings;
- An education and awareness campaign as an important component of an asbestos strategy; and
- Asbestos must only be removed by licensed removalists.

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