

Tuesday 4 April 2023

Prioritising removal of asbestos still needed to tackle mesothelioma

The latest Australian Institute of Health and Welfare report into mesothelioma was released today.

Mesothelioma is an aggressive form of cancer in the mesothelium – the protective lining on the inside of body cavities and the outside of internal organs.

The main cause of mesothelioma is exposure to asbestos, but it takes 20–40 years on average. Despite asbestos being banned in all forms nearly 20 years ago, cases continue to increase.

Australia has one of the highest measured incidence rates of mesothelioma in the world: between 700 and 800 people are diagnosed with mesothelioma per year. On average, two people are diagnosed with mesothelioma in Australia each day.

Exposure through the built environment is still having a legacy effect.

The new report showed for the 1028 participants assessed as having possible or probable asbestos exposure:

- 78% of men provided information indicating occupational exposure.
- 99% of women provided information indicating non-occupational exposure.

As long as asbestos stays in buildings, the threat of mesothelioma remains.

Quotes attributable to ACTU Assistant Secretary Liam O'Brien:

“Mesothelioma is not going away. Asbestos remains the biggest killer of workers in Australia and as long as we have materials in our buildings that contain asbestos, this terrible disease stay with us for decades to come.

“The prioritised, safe and coordinated removal of asbestos from buildings must be a priority for this Government.

“We reiterate our calls for a worldwide ban on this toxic material. The Australian data highlights that despite banning asbestos in all forms we continue to see rising cases of mesothelioma and asbestos-related disease.

“Knowing what we know about mesothelioma, it is the disease not one more person should experience.”

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Media contact: Gareth Hathway 0499 878 782