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## Government must come clean on future of asbestos safety agency

Anti-workplace safety policies such as the possible abolition of Australia's Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency will put lives in dangers, unions warn.

ACTU Assistant Secretary Michael Borowick called on the Abbott Government to stick to its pre-election commitment and continue supporting the agency including ensuring it is adequately funded into the future.

"Demonstrating that the Government doesn't understand the critical work of the asbestos safety and eradication agency, Finance Minister Mathias Cormann recently released a paper which lists the agency under the heading of "Misuse of separate bodies for public relations purposes" where it described it as being part of "window dressing" for political purpose," Mr Borowick said.

"This is completely incorrect and ignores the shocking local death toll and great suffering of so many Australians. It's also flouts the continued danger asbestos poses and the necessity for a safety agency to exist."

"When the Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency was established by the Labor party it had both the now Prime Minister, Tony Abbott and the now, Employment Minister Eric Abetz's support."

"Through education and removal activities the agency provides a consistent, coordinated national approach to improve safety for workers, renovators and anyone else who might come into contact with the dust.

"A U-turn now would mean the Abbott Government has snubbed public concern, turned their back on a major issue of safety and dismantled an agency set up to prevent asbestos-related disease in this country.

"The Government must explain its plans for the future of Australia's Safety and Eradication Agency immediately.

"Australia has the highest per capita rate of asbestos disease in the world with almost 34,000 people suffering and dying since 1980 because they happened to inhale the deadly dust."

"There are round 700 Australians dying each year from asbestos-related diseases, and tens of thousands of more could be diagnosed in coming decades. This is not the time to drop the baton."

"It's time the Government opened their ears to public concern and stuck to their word on matters of such importance."

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