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CGRC tells residents, when it comes to asbestos

Go slow - Asbestos is a NO go!

Visit asbestosawareness.com.au – To learn what you need to know!

November is National Asbestos Awareness Month and Cootamundra-Gundagai Regional Council (CGRC) is urging homeowners, renovators, tradies and property owners to take the warnings about asbestos seriously when renovating or maintaining homes and properties and learn what they need to know to manage asbestos safely by visiting asbestosawareness.com.au.

In 2020, more than 4,000 Australians will die from asbestos-related diseases caused from exposure to asbestos fibres either in the home or in the workplace – that's 3000 more deaths compared to the number of Australians who have died from COVID-19 in the first year of the pandemic.

However, unlike COVID-19, deaths in Australia from asbestos-related diseases have been ongoing for more than 100 years. Asbestos-related diseases include pleural disease, asbestosis, lung cancer and malignant mesothelioma which can develop 20-50 years after asbestos fibres are inhaled. There is no cure for mesothelioma and the survival time following diagnosis can be as little as 10-12 months.

As with COVID-19, the most effective means of preventing asbestos-related deaths is to prevent exposure – inhalation of deadly asbestos fibres through wearing PPE and safe asbestos management practices. However, according to the Australian Mesothelioma Registry, Australia has one of the highest measured incidences in the world having recorded a steady increase in mesothelioma cases over the past 40 years with two Australians (on average) diagnosed every day this past year alone.*

CGRC Manager of Development, Planning, Building and Compliance, Sharon Langman said, "With Australia among the highest consumers of asbestos in the world, and with the wide-spread use of ACM in the construction of homes built or renovated prior to 1987 and in commercial and non-residential structures prior to 31 December 2003; it's going to be many years (if ever), before all remaining ACM is completely removed from Australian properties so we need to take all the appropriate precautions to manage asbestos safely.

"There are thousands of different types of products that contain asbestos and remain in one third of Australian homes built or renovated prior to 1987 including fibro, brick, weatherboard, clad homes and apartments as well as in many commercial and non-residential structures including buildings, fences and farm sheds.

If undisturbed, well maintained, and in a stable, sealed condition, asbestos is unlikely to pose health risks. However, the risk of inhaling asbestos fibres can occur during maintenance, removal, refurbishment or demolition of ACM when damaged, broken, cut, drilled, sawn, sanded, scraped, waterblasted or if disturbed when using tools - particularly power tools which releases a high concentration of fibres.

"Just as Australians have heeded the serious warnings, work PPE, taken the hard decisions and the necessary precautions to prevent community transmission to dramatically minimise deaths from COVID-19; with asbestos-related deaths in Australia predicted to rise due to homeowners and tradespeople inhaling asbestos fibres during renovations or the maintenance of older properties, Australians must take the warnings about asbestos seriously to protect themselves and their families from avoidable exposure to fibres that can kill,

“Asbestos can be in any home built or renovated before 1987; lurking under floor coverings including carpets, linoleum and vinyl tiles, behind wall and floor tiles, in cement floors, internal and external walls, ceilings and ceiling space (insulation), eaves, garages, roofs, around hot water pipes, fences, home extensions, garages, outdoor toilets, backyard and farm structures, chook sheds and even dog kennels. “Asbestos was used everywhere! So, if you’re a homeowner, renovator, tradie or a property owner, and you don’t know the risks, the products to look for or how to manage asbestos safely, you could be risking your life and the lives of others if you disturb asbestos-containing materials and release fibres into the air that can be inhaled,” Ms Langman said.

“When it comes to asbestos, Don’t cut it! Don’t drill it! Don’t drop it! Don’t sand it! Don’t saw it! Don’t scrape it! Don’t scrub it! Don’t dismantle it! Don’t tip it! Don’t waterblast it! Don’t demolish it! And whatever you do... Don’t dump it! Visit asbestosawareness.com.au - It’s not worth the risk!”

Cherie Barber, Australia’s Renovation Queen and Ambassador for National Asbestos Awareness Month who lost her Grandfather to an asbestos-related disease said, “One of the greatest health threats to families and tradespeople is asbestos fibres during renovations and maintenance so if you’re a renovator or a tradie, when it comes to asbestos *Go Slow! Because asbestos is a NO GO!* Visit asbestosawareness.com.au to learn what you need to know!”

“The more a person is exposed to asbestos fibres, the greater the risk of developing asbestos-related diseases. Tradies are most at risk of exposure to fibres because they are more likely to come into contact with asbestos in their day-to-day work. Fact Sheets and the Residential Checklist for Tradies – A Tradespersons Guide to Asbestos are valuable tools for every tradie enabling them to conduct simple visual inspections of properties to know potential risks ensuring that asbestos is managed safely and in accordance with regulations,” Ms Barber said.

Renovators should visit asbestosawareness.com.au for user-friendly information including the Asbestos in Your Home – The Ultimate Renovators Guide video and the 20 Point Safety Check. They can search Australia’s only online Asbestos Product Database, download Fact Sheets and the user-friendly Asbestos Awareness Healthy House Checklist – A Homeowner’s Guide to Identifying Asbestos-Containing Materials.

The Checklist is a step-by-step guide that helps homeowners conduct a fast and easy visual inspection of their home. Using the Guide homeowners can easily identify any suspected asbestos-containing materials and note its locations to avoid disturbing asbestos and know when to engage an asbestos assessor or removalist to prevent families from being exposed to dangerous fibres.

Prior to 1987, fibro (bonded asbestos cement sheeting) was also commonly used to construct affordable homes, garages for the new family car, Dad’s shed and when adding extensions to existing brick or weatherboard homes such as family rooms while ‘weekenders’ or ‘shacks’ were often built from fibro as low-cost holiday homes.

In rural and regional areas, many farm buildings were also constructed from fibro as a cost-effective means of housing equipment and stock and it was also widely used to construct ‘sleep-out’ additions to farmhouses, workers accommodation and community housing throughout much of regional Australia.

Naturally occurring asbestos (NOA) can also pose problems for some land owners in regional areas. NOA occurs in some rocks, sediments and soils. If covered and left undisturbed, NOA is not considered dangerous. However, if disturbed and microscopic fibres become airborne or settle on clothing or equipment and can be inhaled, NOA can cause asbestos-related diseases.

During National Asbestos Awareness Month Australians are encouraged to visit asbestosawareness.com.au to learn how to manage asbestos safely and host a Blue Lamington Drive morning or afternoon tea at home or at work to help raise awareness of the dangers of asbestos while raising funds to support vital medical research conducted by the Asbestos Diseases Research Institute. Visit www.bluelamington.com

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For more information about asbestos and resources refer to the Journalist Notes in this release or visit asbestosawareness.com.au where high resolution photographs can be downloaded from the media centre.

To arrange interviews with a variety of spokespersons including Asbestos Awareness Ambassadors and case studies contact: Insight Communications on 02 9518 4744

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