

**Submission
No 5**

INQUIRY INTO LOOSE FILL ASBESTOS INSULATION

Organisation: Eurobadalla Shire Council

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16 October 2014

The Director
Joint Select Committee on Loose Fill Asbestos Insulation
Legislative Council - Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

asbestosinsulation@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Dear Sir/Madam

Eurobodalla Shire Council - Inquiry into loose fill asbestos insulation – October 2014

Thank you for your invitation of 26 September 2014 in regard to making a submission to the NSW Parliament's Joint Select Committee inquiry on loose fill asbestos insulation.

In response, Eurobodalla Shire Council offers the following submission:

(a) *the number and location of homes affected by loose fill asbestos insulation.*

The number and extent of residential properties affected by loose fill material within the Eurobodalla Shire is currently unknown.

As a result of the recently launched NSW Government independent investigation to establish the number of residential properties that may contain loose-fill asbestos material (August 2014), a free testing service was offered to residents in the Eurobodalla for a 12 month period to assist in identifying suspected loose fill asbestos in homes built prior to 1980. To date, 11 properties have requested this service through WorkCover.

Council raised with WorkCover and Local Government NSW that the identification of homes affected by loose fill asbestos is difficult to ascertain. The identification process put in place by WorkCover requires self nomination by the property owner and then Council must provide WorkCover with information on the home being built prior to 1980, the registered property owner and other relevant information.

To source information on the home built prior to 1980, requires archive searches which are time consuming and costly. Council recommended to WorkCover that if a resident self nominates, they should be able to provide an indicative, if not accurate, date of the built home and this should be the basis of a free assessment.

Council can readily supply the registered owner of the property details provided the request adhere to privacy requirements.

The request for other relevant information such as approved development application for renovations to the property are not readily available and would require Council to conduct further searches. This 'relevant' information may also provide no basis of the location of homes affected by loose fill asbestos. Please note that homes do not, nor have they, require approval for the installation of insulation.

(b) the actions taken by governments to deal with loose fill asbestos insulation in other jurisdictions.

Eurobodalla Shire Council has been assisting WorkCover through the provision of information for the 11 residential properties that have come forward to date.

In addition, Eurobodalla Shire Council has updated its website (<http://www.esc.nsw.gov.au/council-services/public-environmental-health/public-health/asbestos/guide-to-mr-fluffy-friable-asbestos-insulation>) with current information and links to related websites such as WorkCover and asbestosawareness.com. Council staff who may come into contact with loose fill asbestos insulation have also been informed of the potential hazards and what to do if this material is identified during work activities. Council has also changed practices to ensure work, health and safety of staff related to this issue.

(c) the role of state and local governments to advise and assist home owners and occupiers to reduce the risks posed by loose fill asbestos insulation.

State agencies such as WorkCover and the Ministry of Health should be the lead agencies with regards to the provision of expert advice and information for reducing the risks posed by loose fill asbestos.

To ensure consistency across the State with regards to provision of expert advice and information, the function of Local Government should be limited to that of a referral role to the lead agencies and to assist with the distribution of information to the community.

(d) the requirements for property owners to notify potential buyers, renters, tradespeople and emergency service officers regarding the presence of loose fill asbestos insulation in their property, and

Given the nature of loose fill insulation material (eg crushed raw asbestos which can be easily become airborne or inhaled or ingested if disturbed) Eurobodalla Shire Council agrees that property owners have an obligation to notify potential buyers, renters, tradespeople and emergency service officers if they are aware loose fill asbestos insulation is present in their property.

The ability to mandate that property owners identify if loose fill asbestos is located in their home is low, and the current self reporting may hinder home owners to be proactive due to the perception of increased costs for repair and renovations, decreased property values and the stigma associated with a home containing asbestos.

(e) any other related matter.

Given the unknown scope and potential impact to residential premises within NSW, Council is of the opinion that this matter should be managed and coordinated through the NSW Government to ensure a consistent and equitable approach in the way that the loose fill asbestos insulation issue is managed.

Local Government is not well resourced to deal with this issue. As State agencies already have the technical capability to manage this issue, it would be more cost effective for the NSW Government to coordinate and manage a response than for Local Government to invest in up-skilling or obtaining the specific technical skills to deal with the issue.

The issue of loose fill asbestos is a long term problem which will not be resolved in 12 months as inferred by the free assessment process. The requirement for a long term strategy of how to manage the issue, and how and where home owners can obtain assistance needs to be developed and considered.

Thank you for affording us the opportunity of making a submission to the inquiry. Should you require further information, please contact
on

Yours sincerely

Dr Catherine Dale
General Manager