

**Submission
No 3**

INQUIRY INTO LOOSE FILL ASBESTOS INSULATION

Organisation: Yass Valley Council

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Address all correspondence to:
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8 October 2014

Revd the Hon Fred Nile MLC
Chair
Joint Select Committee on Loose Fill Asbestos Insulation
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Revd Nile

Inquiry into Loose Fill Asbestos Insulation

I refer to the Inquiry by the Joint Select Committee into loose fill asbestos insulation in NSW.

Yass Valley Council is one of the Local Government Areas around the ACT identified as potentially having properties with loose fill asbestos insulation.

To date one property within Yass Valley has been identified as having loose fill asbestos insulation which was picked up as part of an earlier Queanbeyan survey. The information on this property only recently became available to Yass Valley Council.

There is no knowledge to date of any other homes within Yass Valley affected although it is understood that approximately 40 homes have been registered under the recently established voluntary inspection scheme.

There are some concerns that voluntary inspections will not provide a definitive picture of the extent of the problem in Yass Valley. Despite the recent publicity some landowners are not aware of the inspection scheme and its time limits or are fearful of the consequences if their property is identified as having loose fill asbestos insulation.

A mandatory inspection program (with the option of opting out) would be far more comprehensive in establishing the extent of the problem and it would reduce the risk of this continuing to be a problem into the future.

Once a property has been identified there needs to be a clear understanding of the implications for all stakeholders – owners, tenants, tradespeople and emergency services. While it is acknowledged that specific solutions need to be tailored to each individual property there should also be more general information on the typical responses for low, medium and high risk situations.

Due to Yass Valley's location inevitably comparisons are being made with the approach taken in the ACT. There should be consistency across both jurisdictions in the solutions to this problem.

Recently concerns have been expressed by local residents in relation to fire damaged properties containing asbestos materials. For a dwelling with loose fill asbestos insulation, material has the potential to be spread across the neighbourhood increasing the risks to the wider community. Procedures need to be developed for responding to these circumstances and be widely available to the community to remove any uncertainties.

For fire damaged properties with other forms of asbestos, experience has shown that the material can remain on the site unprotected and unmanaged for a period of time between the fire and the removal of the material from the site. The delay can become prolonged due to protracted negotiations with insurance companies or in the case of uninsured properties the owners not having the available resources to undertake the removal work. Where there is an undue delay prior to the removal of the material, neighbours and the wider community can become anxious even though there may not be an actual or perceived risk from asbestos material.

Since being made aware loose fill asbestos issue Council has been proactive in responding to the by developing an Action Plan which includes:

- Staff training on asbestos identification, management and regulations
- Searches of database for Mr Fluffy homes including:
 - DA register
 - Contaminated Land register
 - Follow up Queanbeyan claims
- Letter to ratepayers providing:
 - An asbestos insulation home owners guide/factsheet
 - Information on web site resources
- Media campaign involving:
 - Press release (what has been done, what is being done)
 - Council half page newspaper advertisement
 - Website
 - Facebook
- Letters to State parliamentarians advocating for a State approach for any homes identified as Mr Fluffy homes similar to ACT Government

In addition, for those properties identified as containing loose fill asbestos insulation Council is including them in its potentially contaminated land register. This is an internal register and is used to determine requirements for any development or redevelopment at the site. The information is also used in the issuing of Planning Certificates as part of the property conveyancing process. A general precautionary statement is now being included in Planning Certificates indicating that houses constructed prior to 1982 may contain loose fill asbestos and contact should be made with WorkCover.

While Council has been proactive in raising the issue especially by writing to all landowners it comes at a cost directing our scarce resources from other programs and priorities.

Council trusts that the issues raised in this and other submissions are taken into account to develop a consistent approach to managing loose fill asbestos not only in NSW but also consistent with that of the ACT.

Yours sincerely



David Rowe
General Manager