

Submission
No 36

INQUIRY INTO LOOSE FILL ASBESTOS INSULATION

Name: Mr Edwin Casey

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Partially Confidential

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SUBMISSION TO THE NSW PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE EXAMINING 'MR FLUFFY' ISSUES

Dear Committee Members

Thank you for the opportunity to share with you my circumstances. My story is very recent. My partner and I purchased our house in August 2014!

My name is Edwin Casey, aged 26 and I live with my partner, aged 27 and our two children, who is three and 11 months. For the last two years we had been renting in Canberra but decided earlier this year that we should try and purchase our own house as we had become fed up with the disruption caused to the children by yearly leases. I am currently working in horticulture and studying landscape architecture at UC. Dale works as a receptionist in a legal firm and also works at weekends as a hairdresser to supplement our income. We just get by with help from family.

Having previously lived near Bungendore we thought it a nice village to settle in. We starting looking at properties earlier in the year and in July we found this small weatherboard house, comprising two bedrooms plus a study, with a shower room, no bath and one lounge/dinning area. Whilst it was small, we anticipated that as the children grew we could extend it and give them more space. The kitchen and shower area had been renovated in the last 5 years and it seemed a perfect place to start. At \$410,000 asking price it was not cheap for us but presented value. We ended up negotiating a price of \$398,000

We undertook all the usual checks before entering into a sales contract, including having an inspection for asbestos and settled in August 2014. We moved in the end of August and have since enjoyed our quaint little slice of the country. Our house, although small has become our happy home. We have enjoyed the rural lifestyle, and are looking forward to raising our family in this community, and had hoped over time our small house could grow with our family.

On Wednesday the 12th of November we received correspondence from Workcover NSW notifying us of a confirmed presence of loose fill asbestos. Understandably we were shocked, and left asking, how can in 2014, with all the information regarding this horrible product, such a mistake like this occur.

When the private asbestos inspection took place, the inspector only looked in the roof cavity, or that part that could be accessed without removing the tin roof and saw insulation bats and although no samples were taken he reassured us that he could see no evidence of loose fill asbestos. We had also thoroughly inspected the

council records of the block and were confident we were free of loose fill asbestos.

On the following morning of the 13th of November I phoned NSW Workcover and spoke with _____, Heads of Asbestos Coordination Authorities Secretariat, regarding the letter they sent us. I explained to _____ that we had newly purchased the property, and had undertaken an asbestos inspection prior to exchanging contracts. I asked her if the source of 'confirmation' of loose fill asbestos was from the records of an installer of the product, and she explained that the information they received would have likely come from our local Council records.

I then proceeded to call my local council, Palerang, to enquire on any information they may have provided to Workcover NSW, and whether they were aware of the presence of loose fill asbestos in our property. I spoke with _____, the Health and Building Surveyor.

He explained that in 1999 Queanbeyan city council carried out a sampling program in the Queanbeyan district, whereby dust samples were volunteered and tested for loose fill asbestos. He explained he was actually involved in that program in a previous role within Queanbeyan city council, and as far as he was aware only one house tested positive within the Palerang shire, and from his memory it was on our street I asked him whether he could check records at Palerang and Queanbeyan to see if he could find any more information regarding the positively tested property. He wasn't able to confirm whether it was our property and he took my details and said he would look into it and call back.

On the 14th of November I received a phone call from _____, Director of Planning and Environment and Palerang Council. He reiterated the story that Mr _____ told, however he was able to confirm in fact it was our house. In fact, he went to explain that in June, Palerang received correspondence from Queanbeyan city council notifying them that this property had previously tested positive. _____ said that in July a letter was then sent to the then residents informing them (perhaps triggering them putting it on the market).

We are now waiting upon a NSW Work Cover investigation including air testing and a more thorough investigation or whether this toxic material is in the walls or sub frame.

From my knowledge of the circumstances in the ACT no one can ever give a guarantee that a house that has had loose fill asbestos will ever be safe and thus all the houses in Canberra are being demolished. I am yet to be told the date of the Government inspection and we have decided to organize our own and pay for it.

On 19 November 2014 we moved out of our house and are staying with family, on the advice of the new contract asbestos contractor we have engaged, _____, until the building has been tested. With two small children in a bedroom with exposed wall vents we are not prepared to take

any risks. Whilst we have moved in with family, this has been at our own cost, as unlike the ACT, there is no support for people that have had to move out. This has caused a significant amount of stress for our family, particularly our young children.

Even if testing informs us that there are no fibers in the air we will never be able to renovate or sell this house. We could not do morally what has been done to us even if we could and we expect that the NSW Government will move quickly to make such action illegal.

If we were to follow the NSW WorkCover advice, then we would have to spend significant time and money to “make it safe”, which is a farce considering we have just purchased a property that should be a livable home. I see that across the border in ACT, expert advice is that these house be knocked down, because the risk cannot be safely managed. If the test comes back positive, I believe there is no alternate option but to knock our house down.

Throughout the purchase process and in the subsequent months we have lived in the property, no information has been provided to us regarding the danger of our property. Unlike the ACT, this house was able to exchange hands with potentially life threatening information concealed, completely within the rights of the owners, and the law.

We are clearly shocked and upset that in 2014 with everything that is known about this problem that the system in NSW could allow anyone to be in our situation of buying a house, known by many in the government to be contaminated.

We hope that your committee can quickly provide strong recommendations so that others don't have their financial security and health threatened like we have. This problem needs to be solved once and for all now

Yours sincerely

Edwin Casey