

**Submission  
No 12**

## **INQUIRY INTO LOOSE FILL ASBESTOS INSULATION**

**Name:** Mr Geoff Fary

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Australian Government  
Asbestos Safety and Eradication Council

Location Code N255EL8  
GPO BOX 9880  
CANBERRA ACT 2600  
enquiries@asbestossafety.gov.au

29 October 2014

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

Dear Chairman

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Joint Select Committee on Loose Fill Asbestos Insulation. The terms of reference for this inquiry demonstrate that you are dealing with matters of vital public health importance to the residents of NSW.

I am the former Chairman of the Asbestos Management Review (AMR) commissioned by the Australian Government in 2010 - and the author of its report and recommendations, which were delivered in June 2012. A copy is enclosed for your information and reference. The Government endorsed eleven of my report's twelve recommendations and the *Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency Act (2013)* was consequently legislated into effect with the unanimous support of the federal parliament in 2013. I was subsequently appointed Chairman of the Asbestos Safety and Eradication Council established under that Act.

The AMR was presented with evidence that an increasing percentage of Australians are contracting fatal asbestos related cancers such as mesothelioma following exposure to airborne fibres in domestic environments, through activities such as working or living in homes with asbestos containing materials (ACMs). One of the most dangerous of these is the "Mr Fluffy" type loose fill asbestos insulation that is the subject of your terms of reference.

Chapter Three of the AMR report addresses the challenges posed to governments and the community by the presence of these residential ACMs. In particular, the evidence regarding the presence of ACMs in domestic residences considered by the AMR caused it to arrive at recommendation 3 (b):

- 3. (b) A requirement that an asbestos content report (ACR) be undertaken by a competent assessor to determine and disclose the existence of ACMs in residential properties constructed prior to 1987 at the point of sale or lease, and prior to renovation, together with a property labelling system to alert workers and potential purchasers and tenants to the presence of asbestos.**

Despite an extensive publicly funded removal program in the 1980s, the recent discovery of the ongoing presence of dangerous loose asbestos fibres in Mr Fluffy treated homes in the ACT, and the evidence which has now emerged of similarly treated but un-remediated homes in NSW, underscores both the wisdom and urgency of the total package of AMR recommendations.

A variety of loose fill insulation materials were installed in hundreds of thousands of Australian homes during the 1950s, 60s and 70s involving fibreglass, treated paper or even sheep wool. These installations were carried out in an ad hoc and unrecorded way – often by operators going door to door. Given that we know that loose fill asbestos was widely used for similar installations around that time in other parts of the world such as the UK and North America, it would be unwise to assume that the Australian application was confined to Mr Fluffy and/or the ACT and a handful of nearby NSW locations.

Without concerted action to identify and label all these properties – and to ultimately safely remove and dispose of the loose fill and other dangerous ACMs – it is inevitable that many more men, women and children will unwittingly be exposed to and contract avoidable fatal diseases from these deadly materials.

My suggestion to the Joint Select Committee is that it recommends to the NSW Government the commencement of a comprehensive loose fill asbestos insulation inspection, labelling and eradication program along the lines suggested above. This matter, and the other now almost daily incidences of dangerous public exposures to airborne fibres from the nation's legacy of widespread asbestos contamination, highlights the need for NSW – and all other state and territory jurisdictions – to engage in a concerted effort with the Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency to deliver the outcomes of the National Strategic Plan for Asbestos Management and Awareness. This includes raising awareness and taking an active approach to managing the ongoing risks of asbestos exposure, including those posed by loose fill asbestos insulation.

I wish the Joint Select Committee well in its important role and would be happy to provide any further input you may require.

Yours sincerely

**GEOFF FARY**

**Chairman**

**Asbestos Safety and Eradication Council**

**Attached:** Asbestos Manager Review Report, June, 2012

