

Media Release

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Cyclone Debbie asbestos debris warning

The deadly dangers Cyclone Debbie has brought to north and central Queensland won't end after the cyclone finally blows itself out, the Asbestos Disease Support Society (ADSS) has warned.

There could be significant health risks lurking in the debris, and community members, volunteers and workers engaged in the clean-up after the storm will need to be careful if they do not want to put themselves and others in harm's way.

ADSS Chief Executive Officer Amanda Richards urged the community and the army of volunteer and other workers expected to help in affected towns to be careful and treat every pile of damaged building material as asbestos-contaminated until professional tests proved otherwise.

Failure to take precautions now could result in potentially fatal health issues many months or even years after the impacts of Cyclone Debbie were a distant memory.

Asbestos-related diseases have a long latency period and symptoms can take between 10 and 50 years after an exposure to show up.

"Given the age of some buildings in affected areas, it is highly likely debris and damaged walls, roofs and floors will contain asbestos," Ms Richards said. "Asbestos can be found in such things as fibro wall sheeting, corrugated super six rooves, Hardie plank cladding and the older type lino.

"The longer the debris is left out, the more dangerous it becomes. As the materials dry, the asbestos fibres dislodge and become airborne.

"This means people who are nowhere near the damage still risk inhaling toxic materials and having it lodge in their lungs."

Ms Richards urged people to take extreme care during the repair period, especially on older buildings that were more likely to have asbestos materials, and to wear protective suits where possible.

"If people believe that they have been exposed to asbestos, they should contact ADSS to get an exposure form and advise their doctor to record in their medical file that they may have had contact with dangerous materials," Ms Richards said.

If people had concerns or needed advice they could contact ADSS on 1800 776 412.