

Media Release

Government hopefuls must commit to better renovation safety

22 November 2017

The Asbestos Disease Support Society (ADSS) is calling for a commitment by all major Queensland political parties to improve home-owner safety by abolishing regulations that allow unqualified people to remove materials that contain hazardous asbestos.

ADSS says the Queensland election is a good opportunity for all parties to declare their position on whether community safety is a priority for them if they formed government.

It was even more appropriate now, as this week is Asbestos Awareness Week (November 20 – 24) which raises recognition of the dangers of asbestos products and commemorates those who have died or continue to suffer as a result of contamination.

Asbestos can be found in such things as Super 6 fibro roofs and fencing, Hardie plank cladding and fencing and Soffits (eaves). Rule of thumb is that if a home is built before 1990 it will more than likely have asbestos- containing products. The main areas of the home affected are usually the bathroom, laundry and kitchen areas.

ADSS Chief Executive Officer Amanda Richards said the Queensland Government had in the past decade strengthened asbestos removal and disposal laws to help workers safely handle the product and reduce the chance of contracting asbestos-related diseases like mesothelioma and asbestosis.

But the current regulations allowed home owners to remove up to 10m² of asbestos fibro as part of their renovations, or a home owner could complete a short course for certification allowing them to remove more than 10sq meters.

Ms Richards said the government had permitted home owners to remove asbestos-containing materials out of a concern about rising renovation costs. Some argued it would be prohibitive on cash-strapped home owners to require them to contract licensed trades people to remove small amounts of the material.

“However, the costs are only \$35 - \$60 a square meter which, compared to the cost of contracting these insidious diseases, is miniscule,” she said.

The government assumed home owners would take the necessary safety precautions themselves before removing what could easily be deadly materials. But anecdotal feedback at home shows had indicated to ADSS people were not taking the correct precautions, and were putting themselves, their families and the community at risk.

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Ms Richards said ADSS understood the need to keep costs down for home renovators, but health and safety should be the number one priority. An attempt to save a few dollars during a renovation could end in many years later in a world of physical, emotional and financial pain.

“The government doesn’t let renovators do their own electrical work,” she said. “All electrical work must be done by a licensed electrician because of the health dangers involved.

“So why is it okay with asbestos, which is a Class 9 hazardous substance?”

She said many people who contracted asbestos-related, incurable diseases did so from home renovations.

“My advice to homeowners is to not take the risk, protect yourselves and your family” Ms Richards said.

“Even if the government doesn’t change the laws, don’t do it. Bring in experienced and licensed asbestos removalists.”

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