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Work stopped as Mr Fluffy worker filmed jumping in asbestos skip



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A worker helping demolish a Mr Fluffy home has been filmed jumping into a skip holding asbestos contaminated waste without wearing a mask or protective clothing.

When WorkSafe ACT was made aware of the footage - which was taken last Friday - it stopped work at the site on Wednesday.



In the video taken at 4 Barrow Place, in Lyons, the worker was not wearing their Personal Protection Equipment. *Photo: Rohan Thomson*

But it later declared the worker had not been exposed to asbestos fibres through his actions because the waste had been wrapped in plastic.

The worker's blue regulation Personal Protection Equipment can be seen folded on the ground to the left of the worker, while other workers wearing their PPE can be seen working in the background.

The video was taken at 4 Barrow Place, Lyons by Ben Carvalho. Ben's father Leo was arrested outside the Mr Fluffy demolition site last week after protesting that demolition safeguards were not being followed.

A spokesman for WorkSafe said it had contacted the principal contractor immediately upon seeing the image of the worker in the skip without safety gear.

But it later issued a statement saying it was "satisfied that at no time was there any risk of contamination from airborne asbestos fibres to the worker, or any member of the public. All asbestos materials are wrapped before they are moved from the premises to ensure there is no risk to the public or workers handling the materials".

WorkSafe was also "satisfied with the remedial actions taken by the person conducting a business or undertaking in relation to managing the risks of a worker entering a skip bin and handling asbestos materials".

That assurance is not enough for Unions ACT, however, with secretary Alex White saying the video only confirmed union concerns about safety at Mr Fluffy demolition sites - for both workers and the community.

This follows last week's looting allegations - in which homes may have been ransacked for salvageable goods - now the subject of an ACT Police investigation.

Mr White said work must be stopped while the demolition program was thoroughly investigated and all contractors were made aware of their obligations to their workers and to the safety of the wider community.

He said the video raised a number of serious questions about safety protocols for workers - in this case proper use of PPE - and whether these were being handled properly by contractors.

"We need a temporary suspension of the demolition works to ensure the Canberra community can have confidence in this whole process... Contractors may be up for reckless endangerment if it turns out asbestos-containing materials end up out in the community," he said.

The union had previously been called to the Barrow Place site by concerned neighbours after they watched a team of men wearing no personal protective equipment break through the front door using a sledgehammer and crow bars to begin internal preparatory works such as ripping out cupboards, fixtures and carpets from the condemned home.

Mr Carvalho, a 71-year-old grandfather, wanted those items tested for loose fibres and refused to move out of the path of the trucks as they attempted to access the Barrow Place property and remove the skip. He was subsequently arrested and will face court on May 31.

He said the video taken by his son showed that the procedures were not being followed.

The Carvalho family have been in a long-running dispute with the Asbestos Response Taskforce about the future of their own Lyons home, which is the contaminated original residence of former Mr Fluffy operator Dirk Jansen.

According to Ben Carvalho: "I actually tried to speak to this guy to tell him to put his gear on, and to explain that he shouldn't be breathing in the dust, but he couldn't speak English".

The foreign-born worker is sub-contracted by one of the principal contractors undertaking the ACT government's demolition program.