

**2020**

**THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE  
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

**ANNUAL STATEMENT**

**ASBESTOS RELATED WORKS ACROSS CANBERRA**

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Following National Asbestos Awareness Week on 23-29 November 2020, today I table the Annual Statement to update the Assembly on asbestos-related works undertaken by the ACT Government to reduce the risk of asbestos to Canberrans during the last financial year.

Materials containing asbestos are present right across our city, and the ACT Government continues to actively manage the risks that both friable and non-friable asbestos present throughout Canberra to ensure the safety of residents, workers and the broader community.

The Asbestos Response Taskforce continues to make significant progress to realise the ACT Government's goal of eradicating loose fill asbestos insulation from Canberra homes, with only 44 of the 1027 known affected properties remaining as at 30 June 2020.

Homeowners participating in the Loose Fill Asbestos Insulation Eradication Scheme had until 30 June 2020 to exchange a contract to surrender their property to the ACT Government. Due to the many challenges COVID-19 has created for the Canberra community, the ACT Government extended the property surrender deadline for any remaining affected properties to either 30 June 2021, or six months after the COVID-19 Public Health State of Emergency is lifted in the ACT, whichever date occurs later. Many homeowners are now working toward surrendering their remaining affected property to the Territory by the extended deadline, and the Taskforce continues to provide support and information to these homeowners.

During 2019-20, the ACT Government also announced the Pathways to Eradication Package for properties affected by loose fill asbestos insulation which remain privately-owned beyond 30 June 2020. The initiatives in this Package balances the safety risk affected properties pose to the community with the individual needs of homeowners. The Pathways Package initiatives include:

- Transition Assistance, which provides homeowners with complex health and financial circumstances the ability to access equity in their home to assist with expenses associated with moving to new accommodation.
- Additional Asbestos Management Plan requirements, which commenced from 1 July 2020 and makes it easier for tradespeople, care workers and visitors to access the information they need when attending an affected property.
- Development and Building Approval restrictions, which commenced from 1 July 2020 limiting building approval at affected properties to demolition of affected structures or work essential for health, safety or reasonable living conditions.
- Introduction of an Occupancy Prohibition, which also commenced from 1 July 2020 making any new rental agreements void, and preventing new owners living in an affected premise; and
- Consideration of Compulsory Acquisition of any privately-owned affected properties remaining from mid-2025. For this initiative, commencement action will be timed on a case-by-case basis, taking into consideration the specific circumstances of each remaining homeowner and/or resident.

On 21 May 2020, the Assembly passed the *Loose-Fill Asbestos Legislation Amendment Bill 2020* to enact the necessary safety initiatives of the Pathways Package.

Beyond the Loose Fill Asbestos Insulation Eradication Scheme and work undertaken by the Taskforce, there has been further comprehensive asbestos-related work undertaken by other agencies across government.

Safety remains paramount when it comes to asbestos, and the ACT Government requires that all suitable precautions and safety measures are undertaken during demolition and remediation works involving asbestos. This includes dust suppression, air quality monitoring and appropriate waste management procedures.

During 2019-20, WorkSafe ACT continued to support asbestos safety and compliance by:

- undertaking 36 asbestos-related inspections, including 25 inspections related to affected properties containing loose fill asbestos insulation
- receiving 442 notifications for asbestos removal works in the ACT, and
- continuing to monitor and promote compliance with requirements under the *Dangerous Substances Act 2004*, including for Asbestos Management Plan requirements for 30 properties on the Affected Residential Premises Register relating to loose fill asbestos.

Housing ACT is an active and engaged property manager, with safety for residents and contractors at the core of its business. As such, Housing ACT undertakes asbestos related activities through the Total Facilities Management contract with Programmed Facility Management.

In 2019-20, Housing ACT spent just over \$530,000 on air monitoring, testing, removal and disposal of asbestos containing materials.

Additionally, Housing ACT routinely undertakes asbestos testing, removal, and disposal activities through licensed sub-contractors as part of the standard process for preparing existing properties for demolition. As at 30 June 2020, 46 properties were demolished as part of the 2019-20 program that included testing and/or removal of bonded asbestos.

As part of the Housing ACT 2020-21 program, 49 properties are planned to be demolished. Housing ACT will also continue to safely manage asbestos related activities during works to upgrade kitchens, bathrooms and eaves across the portfolio.

In addition to residential properties, friable and non-friable asbestos can also be located within commercial and community premises and are managed in accordance with Asbestos Management Plans. During 2019-20, removal of asbestos and remediation work occurred at various sites across Canberra, including:

- the City Police Station, where all eaves containing asbestos were removed and replaced with compliant material
- the former Woden CIT buildings, where friable and non-friable asbestos was removed as part of the demolition
- the CIT Bruce and Fyshwick campuses, where asbestos cement sheeting was removed; and
- the Gorman House, Manuka, Strathnairn and Watson Art Centres, where wall and ceiling sheeting containing asbestos was removed.

The ACT Government remains committed to addressing hazardous materials in our schools, with plans for significant work in the coming years.

During 2020-21, the Education Directorate will continue updating site-specific asbestos management plans based on expert advice and review the processes for managing hazardous materials, including asbestos. The Directorate has put in a new process of central approval for school maintenance work, to ensure that the risk of disturbing hazardous materials is adequately considered.

The government's priority is keeping students and staff safe, and the Education Directorate will continue to focus on communicating with parents, carers and school staff so that they have access to the expert advice they need.

The Minister for Education and Youth Affairs will progress a significant program of planned asbestos removal in government schools, and the Directorate will continue to manage asbestos in accordance with site-specific asbestos management plans.

The Transport Canberra and City Services Directorate also progressed removal work finalising Stage 2 of Asbestos Remediation at Birrigai Outdoor School.

During 2019-20, ACT Property Group undertook 204 projects on behalf of the Education Directorate and completed 172 projects. Additionally, ACT Property Group completed six projects for ACT Property Group sites.

During 2020-21, ACT Property Group will work on 32 asbestos related projects for the Education Directorate. Furthermore, \$3 million of a Better Infrastructure Fund has been allocated to commence Stage 3 of asbestos remediation work at Birrigai Outdoor School, and an additional \$160,000 has been allocated for asbestos related works for ACT Property Group sites.

ACT Property Group will continue to undertake removal and remediation where required and will arrange for hazardous material reports to be updated to determine any future works.

Canberra Health Services continued to demonstrate a commitment to asbestos safety and awareness within its buildings by:

- requiring all asbestos work be performed in compliance with Australian Standards and Codes of Practice
- ensuring every contractor has the relevant asbestos qualifications prior to being permitted to work for Canberra Health Services
- notifying asbestos related work through the central Safety and Risk team to ensure information is captured in the Canberra Health Services asbestos register and management plans
- reviewing and updating all asbestos management plans every five years
- training project officers through the Health Project Representative training in their requirements to provide asbestos related information to all workers prior to commencement
- maintaining a SharePoint site as a central location for asbestos related information including air monitoring results, clearance certificates and asbestos identification reports to be available to all Canberra Health Services workers; and
- maintaining an unexpected finds protocol in place for all Canberra Health Services buildings and construction works.

During 2020-21, Canberra Health Services will continue to manage asbestos in accordance with the Asbestos Management Plans for each building and require contractors undertaking works on behalf of Canberra Health Services to hold the required qualifications.

Ongoing work will continue to deliver individual building Asbestos Management Plans and a scheduled review of an Asbestos Removal Information Sheet is planned to be undertaken and updated as necessary.

In addition to the solid progress of removing asbestos from the Canberra community, during this financial year, the ACT Government is also working together to deliver on Australia's 2019-2023 National Strategic Plan for Asbestos Awareness and Management. This plan was launched by the Australian Government's Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency in November 2019 and guides the work of all Australian government agencies in making sure they are working to prevent asbestos exposure through cross jurisdictional activities and promoting asbestos awareness.

In October 2020, 96 per cent of the 1027 identified loose fill asbestos insulation affected properties have been demolished and removed from the Affected Residential Premises Register. The Taskforce will continue to deliver the Scheme, by:

- providing personal support and assistance to homeowners and residents who remain in their homes
- continued scheduling and oversight of demolition and remediation activities as properties are surrendered to the Territory; and
- supporting the sale of remediated blocks to invigorate renewal of Canberra streets and suburbs which were once affected by loose fill asbestos insulation.

The safe remediation and removal of asbestos containing materials from various commercial and community sites across our City will continue to occur, including work at:

- The Winchester Police Centre
- The former Lyneham City Parks Depot
- The former Canberra Technology Park
- Various former Transport Canberra Buildings
- Watson, Ainslie and Gorman House Arts Centres
- The University of New South Wales in Canberra City, and
- The mixed-use sites at Blocks 5,6 & 9 Section 7 Oaks Estate

A procurement process will be undertaken to update Hazardous Materials Reports, site maps and the hazardous materials register/s for ACT Policing and ACT Emergency Services Agency facilities.

WorkSafe ACT will continue to ensure asbestos safety and compliance by:

- the provision of a dedicated Inspector to identify and monitor compliance of Asbestos Management Plans and asbestos removal with the *Dangerous Substances Act 2004* and the *Dangerous Substances (General) Regulation 2004*
- conducting quarterly inspections of each Asbestos Management Plan; and
- conducting a minimum of four inspections for each asbestos removal and demolition of a property affected by loose fill asbestos insulation.

It is clear there has certainly been great progress made in the last financial year on reducing the risk of asbestos to residents, workers and those in the broader ACT community. It is also evident that this work has continued with more asbestos-related activities planned for the remainder of this financial year.

I take this opportunity to remind the community to be asbestos aware before starting any work around their homes. During 2020, when all of Australia has been focused on COVID-19, research shows that more Australians than ever are undertaking DIY work, renovations and minor maintenance around the home.

If a house was built or renovated before 1990, there is a good chance there are materials containing asbestos in that home. Asbestos was used in hundreds of building materials, commonly found in bathrooms, laundries, and kitchens as well as behind tiles and under flooring. Asbestos becomes dangerous once the fibres are disturbed, become airborne and then inhaled. This can happen if you're sanding, drilling, cutting or sawing asbestos-containing materials.

Asbestos lurks in more places than you'd think.

Before renovating, know the risk, be aware of where asbestos might be found and call a licensed asbestos assessor for advice and help. A list of licensed asbestos assessors in the ACT can be found on the Access Canberra website.

There are very real and ongoing human impacts of the legacy of loose fill asbestos on our community. Unfortunately, many households have been financially, emotionally and directly affected, and I hope that in the coming months and years we can continue to provide an appropriate response to those that have been touched.

I commend all agencies involved in this important work to protect residents, workers and the community from the risks posed by asbestos.