

3. CANBERRA TIMES

May 13 2016

Owner of Mr Fluffy household wall unit found in a shipping container comes forward



[Kirsten Lawson](#)

The owner of a wall unit at the centre of allegations of theft from Fluffy homes came forward on Friday as it emerged that her former house had been demolished on Thursday, in the midst of the furore.

Eden O'Mara watched her former Kambah home being demolished, but was unaware of the storm that erupted following the CFMEU's [discovery of the cabinet](#) and other items on Wednesday, after a worker came forward.



Eden O'Mara with daughters Kimberley, 10, Jennifer, 12, and Rachael, 7, outside their Mr Fluffy house in Kambah that was demolished on Thursday. She is devastated by the discovery of a cabinet she believes is hers in a shipping container. *Photo: Elesa Kurtz*

The unit was discovered marked with red paint and sitting in a shipping container in a yard leased by Brisbane firm Caylamax Demolition behind the Griffith shops - a site earmarked for future use by the Manuka childcare centre.

Mrs O'Mara has yet to see the unit but is convinced from photographs that it is hers - and the address matches the one reported by the whistleblower worker.

She attended the demolition on Thursday after being advised by her psychologist that it would help, "like a funeral and a burial", and she said it did. She left thinking she could put a full stop behind that part of her life.

But on Thursday night when she saw a [photo of the cabinet](#), she was devastated.

"I had closure yesterday until this. To see that this has actually happened when the taskforce guaranteed that this wouldn't happen has completely shattered me," she said. "I am just so angry I don't think I've ever been as angry about anything else in my life."

Two investigations are underway - by police and by an auditor appointed by the government's procurement agency.



CFMEU legal officer Garry Hamilton inspects a shipping container, containing a wall cabinet, in a Fluffy contractor's yard. *Photo: Rohan Thomson*

Caylamax has been [allowed to continue demolitions](#) - including the home of Mrs O'Mara at 18 Dinnison Circuit, but is [barred from removing any household items until the investigations are complete](#).

Asked why the demolition had gone ahead on Thursday, given the allegations published in *The Canberra Times* that day, the Asbestos Taskforce said the demolition had been scheduled weeks in advance and the timing was a coincidence.



Workers at a plastic-wrapped house in Kambah, demolished in April by Caylamax. *Photo: Rohan Thomson*

The unit was discovered by a CFMEU inspector among other items inside a shipping container in Caylamax's yard. Caylamax was in the news recently for bringing a plastic wrap technique to Fluffy demolitions in Kambah.

CFMEU ACT secretary Dean Hall said a company representative had told the union that the items in the container had been shipped from Brisbane.



A household cabinet in a shipping container at an asbestos demolition company's yard, showing traces of red paint. The presumed owner has now come forward. *Photo: CFMEU*

But the traces of red paint were a strong indicator that the wall unit might have come from a Fluffy house, given the Asbestos Taskforce is marking fixtures, furniture and fittings with red paint to prevent them being taken from contaminated houses and re-used or sold.

The worker was with Caylamax for three months and says he was fired this week after repeatedly raising concerns about the way household goods were being treated. He, like others, was employed as a casual.

Caylamax general manager Steve Brady said this week the company could not comment while investigations were underway, but events were "disappointing" and the company was cooperating fully with the police and the taskforce.

Mrs O'Mara said she had received a letter telling her her house had been contaminated with Fluffy asbestos on July 20 2014 - her birthday.

An inspection had found just one fibre, in the kitchen, but left her "so scared I couldn't breathe".

The family, with three children, left the home quickly, leaving behind almost everything they owned, including clothes and a wedding dress.

Mrs O'Mara said she left the cabinet and a piano because the wood was not sealed on the back and they were advised fibres could have contaminated them. The cabinet had also been used to block a doorway when the roof had been taken down for their renovation. The family had doubled the size of the house in 2007 with an extension, but been told they weren't allowed to take fittings from the new part of the house - including the spa bath.

She was also upset about the timing of the demolition, having requested it be done when her husband was in town, to no avail.

"The taskforce knows that I'm not coping with it, they know my whole support system is away, and we requested that it not be knocked down in these 14 days when my husband is away," she said. "We've just had our trust so shattered."

Acting deputy director-general of economic development Karen Doran said the Griffith yard being used by Caylamax was a former parks depot. The area is earmarked as a new site for

the Manuka Occasional Child Care Association centre, and Ms Doran it might be used for childcare or shops' parking. If was used for the childcare centre it would need to be remediated, she said.

The zoning of the site allows a "municipal depot" but prohibits general industry, hazardous industry, industry trades, light industry, recycling facility, recyclables collection and waste transfer. But Ms Doran said the Territory Plan allowed for temporary use and the five-year licence with Caylamax, starting January 2016, allowed office space, storage and associated activities.