

Lyons residents fear safeguards aren't being followed at Mr Fluffy homes



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Lyons residents living in the street surrounding Dirk Jansen's former house fear safeguards during demolition are not being followed strictly enough.

Neighbours watched on with alarm on Thursday, April 28, as a team of men wearing no personal protective equipment broke through the front door of 4 Barrow Place using a sledgehammer and crow bars to begin internal preparatory works such as ripping out cupboards, fixtures and carpets from the condemned home.

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Lyons residents Marc Morton, Carl Jackson, Marie Huttley-Jackson, Michael Calkovics, Ron Rogers and Leo Carvalho are concerned for safety procedures being undertaken during demolition. *Photo: Elesia Kurtz*

"The teams were in their normal work clothes and boots, none had protective gear on at all," Barrow Place resident Meg McFarlane said.

"The government's own protocols say asbestos shouldn't be being disturbed unless the situation is controlled. The Taskforce has made many public statements that carpets must be treated as if they are contaminated. So if that is the case, why can it be rolled up un-bagged and tossed into a skip?"

After voicing their concern and calling on the site manager to cease work it was stopped that day.

However the ACT Asbestos Taskforce held a kerbside meeting on Friday, April 30, with concerned residents.

A Taskforce spokeswoman said "there is no temporary stop to works for safety reasons" and that the de-fitting of affected properties in Lyons "are being undertaken safely, with regulation by WorkSafe ACT and informed by licensed asbestos assessors".

Fellow Barrow Place resident and engineer Ron Rogers said despite statements about the meticulous pre-demolition processes he worried the removal of built-in furniture with sledgehammers and crowbars could expose parts of walls or disturb fibres that are known to move.

"They are asking the workers to play Russian roulette, has this got a bullet in it or not?" he said.

"It's beyond belief they are sending people in to do this work in ordinary clothes and without a mask or any protection."

Michael Calkovics worked packing Mr Fluffy stock into Dirk Jansen's truck to earn a bit of pocket money as a youngster.

His lives next door to 4 Barrow Place and said residents were fearful if safeguards weren't strict this long saga may drag out and affect others unnecessarily.

"They have to at least admit it's confusing," he said. "On one hand it's a toxic house and people have to get out but then with this they tell us it's OK to treat it as a normal house. But it's not a normal house, it's a Mr Fluffy house."

An ACT Asbestos Taskforce spokeswoman said the method of removal of fittings and fixtures varied from house to house as the spread of loose-fill asbestos contamination differed for each property.

Licensed asbestos assessors undertook assessments and that along with intrusive pre-demolition assessments testing wall cavities helped to inform an individual Asbestos Removal Control Plan (ARCP) for every home.

The spokeswoman said the control plans dictated how fixtures and fittings were handled and that WorkSafe attended at least four times across the stages of works.

She said if fibres were detected on a bench or wardrobe top, for example, then fittings in that room would be removed with additional controls, such as wrapping and decontamination prior to removal from the house.

However, if contamination was not found "it may be sufficient to remove fixtures and fittings without additional controls. This is all assessed by the licensed asbestos removalist [and assessor] and advised in the Control Plans."

The spokeswoman reiterated how important it was the community was confident in the safety of the process applied at 140 demolitions across the territory.

"Negative air units are in place when walls, floor or ceiling cavities are penetrated as part of the internal asbestos removal works," she said.

"Negative air is not required when a simple de-fitting is occurring and cavities are not being breached, which was the activity that was about to commence on this property."