

## **National Declaration: Towards an Australian Safe Asbestos Free Environment (SAFE)**

**Our aim is to eliminate asbestos related disease and exposures to all forms of asbestos in Australia.**

Australia has an unenviable record of one of the world's highest rate of asbestos related diseases and a legacy of asbestos containing materials (ACMs) in many workplaces and buildings- public and private, commercial, domestic and industrial.

The use of all forms of asbestos in Australia has been banned since 2003, including its import and export. But, because of the legacy of its use, we have not solved the problem of asbestos exposures – for either people at work or in the general community.

The current evidence is that

1. despite a general level of awareness about the dangers of asbestos, workers are unsure and unclear about specific safe work practices
2. householders are not aware of the extent and nature of ACMs in domestic dwellings
3. affected householders are unsure and unclear about specific safe work practices for home maintenance and improvement
4. the condition of asbestos containing building materials is deteriorating and
5. the safe disposal of ACMs, especially for householders, is difficult and very often not properly followed.

To eliminate deadly asbestos related disease in Australia we must decrease and eventually eliminate all exposures to asbestos.

To achieve that, governments and the community generally must adopt programs to safely and systematically remove Asbestos Containing Materials (ACMs) from the built environment.

Internationally, the Australia government must also take a leadership role through trade and other forums to work towards an international ban on the mining, use, and sale of asbestos.

**This National Asbestos Summit calls for the establishment of a National Asbestos Authority (NAA) for a Safe asbestos Free Environment by 2030.**

**The Summit calls on all levels of government to work with organisations like those represented here, in the establishment of such an Authority so that we can extend and implement successful and safe asbestos awareness, control and eradication programs across the nation.**

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## National Strategies

In support of achieving the outcomes identified in the National Declaration for Safe *Asbestos Free Environment (SaFE) Australia* some useful strategies to pursue these objectives include

- increase the awareness on where ACMs are located, in environmental, industrial, commercial and domestic settings
- general public education must include advice to homeowners on the identification and safe handling of ACMs in existing domestic housing stock
- for local governments and environment protection agencies to train and license contractors for safe asbestos waste disposal and for the provision of adequate dedicated secure and permanent waste disposal sites
- a consistent national scheme of notifications of *known* asbestos exposure to contact a specific and appropriately resourced government entity which would have the responsibility to provide referral and education (eg akin to the existing notification system for infectious diseases.)
- ensure that national OHS regulations provide protection from industrial exposures to asbestos containing materials.
- Waste Disposal laws for ACMs must provide for dedicated asbestos waste areas, assist residents for safe removal and disposal and compliment other OHS, building and planning laws.
- Building and planning and waste disposal laws must complement national OHS based Asbestos Regulations, using such mechanisms as:
  - audit of public buildings particularly in the health and education sectors, with asbestos registers and a target of prioritised removal by 2030;
  - in the commercial and industrial sectors; asbestos registers that include the program of prioritised removal by 2030 and a requirement for vendors and landlords and/or their agents to notify buyers and tenants of the asbestos register i.e. asbestos safety certificates;
  - for domestic housing stock, a requirement for the disclosure of ACMs , at the point of sale, with the purpose of the eventual removal of asbestos from of housing stock;
  - landlords (including governments) and vendors and/or their agents in the residential dwelling sector being obliged to notify buyers and tenants of the presence of ACMs i.e. asbestos safety certificates.
- National system of accreditation for asbestos assessors and auditors
- Review performance of asbestos removalists

**Additionally** governments must make arrangements for the allocation of funds in a coordinated approach for medical research

### Proposal to establish a National Asbestos Authority

A National Asbestos Authority (NAA) should initially be established as an independent authority with the appropriate powers to coordinate and enforce all of the aspects contained in the range of tasks and matters listed in this Declaration.

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The NAA would work best as an independent body, as a statutory Authority. Its coverage and agenda would not be limited to workplaces so that it could develop a total community approach.

The activities of the NAA could be overseen by a board of management consisting of a representation from key stakeholders from unions, the community, asbestos disease support groups, health groups and government.

Unanimously agreed June 29<sup>th</sup> 2010 Sydney NSW