

Protecting NSW residents and communities from loose-fill asbestos insulation

Link to the National Strategic Plan:

Strategy:
Removal

Deliverable:
Develop and conduct projects in various locations and conditions where ACMs are in poor condition or likely to cause risks to ensure removal approaches are effective

Outcome:
Options to remove asbestos in poor condition are practical, evidence-based and targeted towards sources of asbestos-related disease

Location:
NSW, statewide

The issue

In 2015, the NSW Government launched the Voluntary Purchase and Demolition Program to address the issue of loose-fill asbestos insulation in NSW residential homes. The program and its associated assistance package is designed to provide safety, certainty and support for NSW residents by locating and remediating properties affected by loose-fill asbestos insulation. The Loose-fill Asbestos Implementation Taskforce manages the program.

One of the key challenges of the Program is to raise community awareness sufficiently to fully engage with potentially affected homeowners in identified local government areas. Success also depends on gaining sufficient trust among affected homeowners for them to elect to have the government test their properties and, if found to be affected by loose-fill asbestos insulation, purchase their property at market value, demolish the premises and remediate the land.

The delivery of the program also relies on employing rigorous work, health and safety standards at each phase of work, particularly in the sample testing of properties, asbestos removal and demolition activities.

The NSW Government also introduced a number of new laws to identify properties affected by loose-fill asbestos insulation and to protect residents, workers and communities.

Action taken

A key action for the first phase of the program was to drive homeowner registration for free sample testing through community awareness and engagement. This was achieved by implementing a comprehensive, targeted advertising campaign, complemented by direct marketing and local community engagement.

As registrations commenced, the program concurrently commenced sample testing of residential properties for loose-fill asbestos insulation. The sample testing inspections are being prioritised to focus on identified local government areas (LGAs) where the likelihood of properties containing loose-fill asbestos insulation is highest. Licenced asbestos assessors who are industry experts in the identification and assessment of friable loose-fill asbestos insulation carried out the testing.

As at 30 June 2017, 139 properties had been identified under the Voluntary Purchase and Demolition Program, where 85 owners elected to have the NSW Government purchase the premises and land, and 28 elected to have the NSW Government purchase the premises only.

Dedicated case managers work closely with homeowners and tenants, supporting them through the process of acquisition, demolition and remediation. In addition to the purchase of the affected premises at market value, financial assistance payments are extended to these homeowners to help ease their financial burden. The program also partnered with the Council of the Ageing (COTA) to provide additional support to affected homeowners who can explore housing options applicable to their personal situation.

In December 2016, the Program commenced the demolition phase in identified 'hot spot' LGAs, starting in Queanbeyan. Working jointly with Public Works

Advisory, a total of 14 affected residential premises across different LGAs were demolished and the sites successfully remediated by 30 June 2017.

Demolition of the properties allows these sites to be removed from the publicly available Loose-fill Asbestos Insulation Register. The register has also been promoted extensively to the wider community, particularly local councils, emergency services personnel, real estate professionals and licensed builders and tradespeople.

Results

The taskforce is now delivering all stages of the program including registration, testing, acquisition, demolition and remediation.

As at 30 June 2017, the taskforce achieved the following milestones:

- over 90,000 registrations were received, of which 70,000 meet eligibility criteria
- 38,053 sample inspection tests had been conducted
- 139 properties were identified as containing loose-fill asbestos insulation
- 80 affected properties purchased were acquired by the NSW Government
- 368 financial assistance payments were made
- 14 properties have been successfully demolished and remediated.

Outcomes

The program has successfully demolished and remediated 14 properties in two of the LGAs with the highest number of properties affected by loose-fill asbestos insulation. These properties have been removed from the Loose-fill Asbestos Insulation Public Register and safely handed back to the community.

Next steps

- The program has reopened registrations for testing in some areas in response to feedback from homeowners who did not previously register. These homeowners were encouraged to register after hearing about the positive experience

affected homeowners had while participating in the program.

- Engagement with stakeholders, community and homeowners remain a priority for the program.
- Sample testing of properties is continuing across NSW, including those with identified roof access issues (for example no man-hole, flat or cathedral roof types).
- The acquisition, demolition and remediation of properties is also continuing, particularly in the most affected areas.
- The taskforce will maintain focus on ensuring the health and safety of all Program stakeholders.

More information

Loose-fill Asbestos Implementation Taskforce:
www.loosefillasbestos.nsw.gov.au

Figure 18: Encapsulated premises



Figure 19: Remediated site

