

Mayoral Minute or Council Motion



Mayoral Minute or Council Motion – Asbestos Awareness Week 23-29 November 2020

Recommendation

1. That <Council> notes that large amounts of asbestos are still present in Australian homes, workplaces and the built environment. Homes built or renovated before 1990 have a good chance of containing asbestos, as do public and commercial buildings.
2. That <Council> notes that exposure to asbestos fibres can cause deadly cancers. There is no known safe minimum level of exposure to asbestos fibres.
3. That <Council> notes that one way to be exposed to asbestos today is through Do-it-yourself (DIY) renovation or home maintenance activities. Furthermore, research shows that during COVID-19 home improvements, maintenance and small jobs have increased exponentially.
4. That <Council> notes the likelihood of asbestos being improperly disposed of in household bins when residents are unaware of asbestos.
5. That <Council> agrees to participate in Asbestos Awareness Week 2020 and engage in awareness-raising activities throughout the Council area during this time.
6. That <Council> reviews and if necessary, revises its policies and public information regarding asbestos, to ensure it is providing the most up to date information, as provided by state and federal governments and local government associations.

Report

I am calling on Councillors to support National Asbestos Awareness Week 2020 – ‘Asbestos lurks in more places than you’d think.’

Large amounts of legacy asbestos are still present in many Australian homes, workplaces and the environment. Australia was the highest user of asbestos per capita in the world, prior to it being fully banned in 2003.

Consistent research shows that Australians are unaware of how prevalent asbestos is, where it might be found, and how to protect themselves from exposure. Worryingly, many Australians doing DIY or home maintenance believe they are doing it safely, but may not be wearing the correct Personal Protective Equipment or taking correct safety precautions.

The Australian Government Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency’s (ASEA) research shows that even amongst targeted trades (for example, construction workers, electricians and plumbers), awareness of where asbestos can be and what to do to stay safe is low.

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.

Research undertaken by ASEA shows that asbestos is not thought of as a risk when planning or undertaking DIY or maintenance work, despite 1 in 5 DIYers having had contact with it in the past. This suggests that most people are either handling it without knowing, or handling it in an unsafe manner. Additionally, a third of DIYers admit to disposing of asbestos inappropriately and the majority do not feel confident managing the risks.

Councils are highly engaged with the community at various points in the home improvement journey, Council is in the unique position to provide awareness materials to the public, advising them to be aware of where asbestos might be located, and to call a professional to check.

I am recommending that <Council> will therefore be participating in National Asbestos Awareness Week 2020 and also examining what Council can do locally to further raise awareness and also introduce checks and balances to ensure residents are not exposed to harmful asbestos fibres.