ThinkPlace

Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency

DIY Home Improvement Research

Insights Report

Australian Government

Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency

About this document

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Purpose

The purpose of this document is to:

- Explain the research design and testing methods used during this project.
- Summarise the insights gathered during the research phase.
- Provide recommendations for the Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency on behavioural tactics that can be used for the effective targeting of messaging.

Audience

The intended audience for the Insights report is primarily the Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency staff although it could be circulated more widely. Other stakeholders that may benefit from reading this repot include the Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency, Agency committee members and jurisdictional stakeholders.

Context

The Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency (ASEA) has been conducting research to understand the awareness, motivations and behaviours of people who conduct DIY home renovation or improvement projects to inform their communications as part of the National Strategic Plan for Asbestos Awareness and Management 2019-2023.

COVID-19 stay at home orders have meant people have been spending more time indoors which has prompted a boom in DIY home improvements.

This increase in home improvement projects brings an increased likelihood of home improvers encountering asbestos. The Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency wants to better understand the awareness, motivations and behaviours of people within three specific home improver segments. This will allow for targeted behaviour change communications to reduce the risk of asbestos exposure.

The Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency engaged ThinkPlace to conduct qualitative research across three key cohorts. The key areas of focus were:

- *Understand the demographics motivations, sources or influence and planning process for each segment.*
- *Develop an understanding of the awareness of, beliefs, and behaviours around asbestos for each segment.*
- *Test messaging that had been prepared by the agency to understand the actions that home improvers were encouraged to take.*

The research was conducted via a series of interviews and focus groups with those who carried out home improvement projects, either small or large across the three key cohorts.

This report captures the key insights that were found as a result of this research.

Research considerations

The current COVID- 19 situation globally, alongside the nation- wide scope of the engagement, has meant that virtual and digital methods of research had to be prioritised. All stages of this review were conducted via online video conferences.

We heard from…

We completed…

Representing 3 critical cohorts

- Comfortable Urban Families
- Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Home Improvers
- Financially Vulnerable Home Improvers

We asked about:

their recent home improvement project…

- Can you tell me about your most recent project you completed?
- What was your inspiration ?
- Did you do any initial research?
- Who was involved in completing this project?
- Was there anyone you spoke to before starting the project?
- What advice did they give you?
- Did you have a budget in mind for the project?
- Did you follow any safety precautions for your project?

their understanding of asbestos…

- Can you tell me about your understanding of asbestos?
- Where would you expect to find asbestos?
- What characteristics would you expect asbestos to have?
- Did you encounter any asbestos during your home improvement project?
- How would/ did you dispose of asbestos?

the prepared messaging…

- What action would this messaging encourage you to take?
- Where would you expect to find this messaging?
- What message spoke to you most?

The full conversation guide for interviews and focus groups can be found in the appendix.

What emerged:

6 cross-cutting insights across and within the cohorts.

3 detailed cohort understandings of behaviours, needs, value drivers and barriers relating to asbestos.

4 Messages were tested to understand the actions that home improvers were prompted to take after seeing this information.

6 Identifiable behavioural biases that home improvers engage with and how behavioural tactics can be used to increase behavioural change.

Cross-cutting insights

Summary of themes and insights

01

Projects were completed out of want, with home improvers taking on more tasks because of the pandemic.

Home improvers reported the completion of the project being a result of want rather than need. With the COVID – 19 pandemic resulting in long wait times with tradespeople, home improvers were more likely to do the project themselves.

02

Reliance on YouTube and hardware store workers for knowledge of how to complete the project.

All home improvers reported using YouTube in the initial stages of the project to learn how to complete the tasks required. They also relied on advice from trusted tradespeople, and in particular workers at Bunnings, to access more knowledge.

03

The approach taken to budgeting directly correlates with the size of the project.

The attitude and approach taken to budgeting for the project was dependant on the size of the home improvement. For smaller projects home improvers usually had an idea of the cost in mind, but were more likely to budget for contingencies on larger projects.

04

Home improvers typically took a reactive approach to safety during the project.

The approach home improvers took to safety was quite reactive. For many it was not a priority, and for others they only took action when there was an obvious threat to safety. For those who did prioritise safety it was mostly considered in the planning stages of the project.

05

Outsourcing of tasks to tradespeople was motivated by need for technical ability and desire for high quality outcome.

During the initial planning stages home improvers would estimate the tasks that were required. Depending on the level of difficulty and the technical ability required they would then outsource accordingly.

06

Home improvers had a good understanding of the hazards of asbestos but did not relate the risks to their personal health and safety.

Home improvers understood the hazards of exposure to asbestos containing material and the importance of following the correct removal process. They minimised the risk of asbestos relating to their project and their health and safety.

01 Projects were completed out of want, with home improvers taking on more tasks because of the pandemic.

Home improvers were driven to complete their project out of a want rather than a need. While there was an underlining drive of 'want', home improvers were also motivated to improve the experience of living in their home, adding value or making improvements to the space.

The effect of the COVID- 19 pandemic on the availability of tradespeople and home improvers having the ability to take on more elements of the project themselves increases the risk of exposure to asbestos containing materials. This has created a new class of home improvers that have skills that they are likely to use again in the future.

For the Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency it offers an opportunity to increase the awareness of asbestos.

> Boredom. Yeah. You know, during lockdown something to do. Just get our teeth into something.

> So we had the painting done and it was between the two lockdowns. So we were limited in terms of the availability of professionals.

> It was heavily dated and just wasn't up to our usual standards.

02 Reliance on YouTube and speaking to trusted tradespeople for knowledge on how to complete tasks.

YouTube videos played an important role in the initial stages of the project for home improvers to gain knowledge on the tasks that were required. While there was a slight preference for Australian videos, the main criteria was clarity of information. Home improvers responded well to the peer-to-peer knowledge sharing style used in tutorial videos. This preference could be leveraged through targeted advertising on videos or promoted videos of home improvers sharing their experience of asbestos during a project.

Home improvers also relied on knowledge from trusted tradespeople; in particular, workers from Bunnings; to complete the renovation. During this time home improvers are open to guidance, and it is an important opportunity for key messaging. Messaging could be displayed at the checkout section of the store providing timely messaging on the risks associated with asbestos in the early stages of the renovation process.

Home improvers were less interested in research relating to inspiration. Those that were searching for inspiration relied on online blogs, using the app Pinterest, and watching renovation shows, such as The Block, offering other opportunities for targeted timely messaging.

> I have a lot of friends that are tradies so I got a lot of advice from them on what to do.

> So then after we watched a couple of YouTube videos on how to do a DIY project, and how to prepare, we called Bunnings.

> Pinterest, a lot of blogs and I have been watching The Block a lot at the moment.

03 The approach taken to budgeting directly correlated with the size of the project.

The approach to budgeting that home improvers took was dependent on the size of the project that they were completing. For smaller projects, home improvers did initial research online to compare the cost of different materials to estimate the cost and decide on how much money they should allocate to the project in total.

During larger projects home improvers allocated budget to specific elements of the project and were more likely to set money aside for contingencies. Home improvers foresaw contingencies relating to electrical, plumbing, or any structural issues that may have been uncovered in the process. During the research asbestos removal was not considered as a contingency for any of the projects.

Using the behavioural change theory of 'coupling' where we relate new behaviours to those that already exist, asbestos should be framed as a contingency that should be considered at the start of projects along with the contingencies that home improvers are already considering.

> We guesstimated what it would cost and what the painting would be. We looked online to get an idea of how much the paint would cost.

> I allowed for $30,000 for the project and it was more of a case of it is has to be done it needs to be done.

> I had an extra two grand in case something went wrong.

04 Home improvers typically took a reactive approach to safety during the project.

Home improvers took a reactive approach when the health and safety of them or their family were obviously at risk.

Underlying health conditions such as asthma and experience working in the health industry were motivators in considering the safety implications of their projects.

An alternative approach taken to safety was a 'common sense approach' that followed some basic measures such as wearing goggles or watching for obvious hazards. Some home improvers also ignored advice that had been given relating to safety procedures that should be considered.

Safety and risk were considered predominantly in the planning stages of the project when motivation was high. As the project commenced and motivations decreased safety was less of a priority.

Targeted messaging of the health and safety risks of asbestos in the initial planning stages of projects would prompt home improvers to consider any implications that their actions may have in exposing them or their family to the risks of asbestos.

> We were conscious of risks in the planning stage but through the process not as much.

> My safety was a bit slack. My brothers would walk past me and say: "you should be wearing proper shoes" or "put a face mask on" and I'd kind of say to them, I'll be right. So it wasn't a major concern, but I know it probably should have been.

> I am more safety conscious at the start of a project and get a bit lazier towards the end...

> There was a lot of dust, so it was mainly just masks really. There wasn't really much else we accounted for in regards to safety.

05 Outsourcing of tasks to tradespeople was motivated by need for technical ability and desire for high quality outcome.

While home improvers were motivated to complete many elements of the project themselves there was a reliance on tradespeople to be involved in more technical aspects, and or when there was a desire for a more high-quality finish.

Home improvers were likely to contact a tradesperson during the planning stages, when they understood the tasks that were required, and were more likely to engage with tradespeople they had received via a recommendation.

When professional tradespeople were involved in a project there was an assumption that they would advise the home improver if there was any asbestos present. The reliance on tradespeople was due to a lack of clear understanding and information on where asbestos may be present. Home improvers who live in homes built before 1990 require clarity of information and direction relating to the risks. There is an opportunity to re-frame messaging to empower the home improver to take a more active role in questioning a professional on whether asbestos may be present.

> The tiler came in and gave us a hand getting it perfectly straight. Cause we, that if you get that wrong, it looks awful and they know what they're doing.

> So the parts we got the professional to do were the parts we knew we weren't going to knock down at some point. We didn't want a painter to come in and paint walls we were going to knock down.

> So I did the brunt of the work and he did the technical side of installing it correctly to the dimensions.

06 Home improvers had a good understanding of the hazards of asbestos but did not relate the risks to their personal health and safety.

Home improvers across all cohorts had a good understanding of the hazards relating to asbestos. This was from hearing stories relating to asbestos from friends and on the news. Home improvers had a low understanding of the risks that were associated with exposure to asbestos-containing materials.

Home improvers had a good understanding that the removal should be completed by a professional. There was a reliance on online research to access specific information relating on who to contact.

The barriers to contacting professional removalists were cost and misinformation. Home improvers were more likely to justify the extra expense if there was a large amount of asbestos containing materials present. Home improvers also reported misinformation from tradespeople regarding the amount of asbestos-containing materials that need to be present in order to engage with professional asbestos removalists.

There is an opportunity for clear messaging to prompt home improvers at the start of the renovation process. This could be through targeted advertising when home improvers are researching their project or with in person advertising in hardware stores.

> And then probably would have then started to Google, like how it says it don't damage or disturb it.

> The 10% rule wasn't shown, we felt like we were mislead when we were told about it.

> I knew about it, but didn't think too much of it.

Behavioural Change Theories

Behavioural Change Theories

What are behavioural biases?

Behavioural biases are irrational beliefs or behaviours that can unconsciously influence the decision-making process. There are two groups of behavioural biases. Emotional biases and cognitive biases.
Emotional biases occur when action is taken on a feeling rather than a fact letting emotion effect judgement.
Cognitive biases occur when errors in thinking arise when processing or interpreting the information that is available to use.

What are behavioural change tactics?

Behavioural tactics are based on social psychology principals and are key components in understanding how to create meaningful social and behavioural change. By layering these principals with the process that the home improver follows it gives a unique insight into when the home improver is most likely to positively engage with messaging to create behavioural change.

Mapping home improvers journey using behavioural biases and tactics

The diagram on the following page maps the common behavioural biases that home improvers showed during the research at each stage of the project. The diagram also highlights the opportunities for behavioural change tactics to create meaningful engagement. Ideally, these tactics would influence the home improvers' unconscious behaviours and encourage them to adopt positive behavioural changes in their approach to asbestos.

Journey Mapping with behavioural biases and tactics

Behavioural Biases of home improvers that unconsciously influence their decision-making process.

Opportunities for behavioural tactics to be used to influence the decision-making process.

Project Idea	Planning and Research	Project Commencement	Project in Progress	Completed
Behavioural Biases				
Action Bias A preference to act, usually to our benefit – seen when participants were motivated to complete a project as they had extra time.	**Self Efficiency** A person's confidence that they can master a behaviour or a goal. For example, a home improvers confidence that they will be able to learn a skill for the project to be completed.	**Social Norms** Beliefs that are collectively held about what behaviours are appropriate when interacting with asbestos.	**Status Quo Bias** Preference for how things are and a resistance to change. Lack of openness for alternative approaches.	**Decision Fatigue** Decision making gets worse when cognitive abilities get worn out. This was especially clear relating to the approach taken to safety.	**Ostrich Effect** Avoidance of things like costs that we might have to face head on. This occurs when home improvers come into contact with asbestos during their renovation and do not want to face the costs associated with removal.
Boredom. Yeah. You know, during lockdown something to do.	It was more 'how to' how-to-do this properly without making a mess and getting it right.	There was a couple of the houses that were built around the same time, so they didn't have any issues. So I assumed that we didn't have any issues either.	Some of my friends came to make sure there was nothing there.	I am more safety conscious at the start of a project and get a bit lazier towards the end.	If it was just a small piece, like the sides from the electrical board, then I think I would toss in the bin and be done with it with it, it would depend on how much it would cost me.
Behavioural Tactics				
Anchoring Bias We rely heavily on the first piece of information we receive. **Opportunity:** using Google targeted advertisements when home improvers are in the initial research stage to ensure it is the first piece of information relating to asbestos they interact with.	**Lag Effect** Spacing out of information makes us more likely to remember it. **Opportunity:** Use an omni-channel campaign to target the home improvers with messaging at each stage of the renovation process, including in-store when buying renovation materials.	**Framing Effect** When decisions are influenced by how messaging is framed **Opportunity:** to frame asbestos as an important contingency that should be budgeted for as a contingency when planning a project. This could be advertisements targeting home improvers researching products to estimate costs.	**Endowment Effect** Why we value items more if they belong to us **Opportunity**: messaging targeted at this stage should highlight the financial, health or damage that may occur to the home improver, their family or their home if asbestos is found and not delt with safely.	**Salience Bias** Why we focus on information that is more noteworthy and ignore the rest. **Opportunity**: approaching the end of the project there is less opportunity for the home improver to be impacted.	**Opportunity**: approaching the end of the project there is less opportunity for behavioural change to be effective. This must be considered in the context of messaging around safe and legal disposal of asbestos waste, which comes at the very end of a project.

Understanding the Cohorts

Cohort name:

Comfortable Urban Families

Home improvers in this cohort have a higher income and are driven by final outcome and saving on costs where they can.

- The whole family is involved in the project
- I own my home and have another investment property
- I am motivated by final outcome and adding value to my home
- I remember hearing about asbestos on the news
- I have multiple renovation projects at the same time
- I need to be reminded about asbestos

Understanding This Cohort

Comfortable Urban Families

Cohort Size

7 Home improvers from this cohort took part in the research.

2 Took part in the in-depth interviews.

5 Took part in the focus groups.

Home Improvement Motivation

"Final outcome and the quality of the job when it is done is most important and I try and save on costs where I can."

Behavioural Bias Tendency

False Uniqueness Bias

The tendency to see their projects and themselves as more singular than they actually are. They need to be reminded of the risks that are present, in particular with smaller projects.

Understanding of asbestos

This cohort understand the hazards, risks, and characteristics relating to asbestos. This understanding is from hearing about asbestos on the news and previously having experience renovating properties where asbestos is present.

Priorities in the home improvement process

Factors that were most most motivating in their project were:

- Cost
- Safety
- DIY Ability

Barriers to considering risks of asbestos during a project

While this cohort had a high level of understanding of the characteristics and where asbestos would be found, there was a disconnect between applying this knowledge to the current project that they were completing particularly if it was a small project.

It is not front of mind even when home improvers knew that asbestos was present in their home

Cohort name:

Finically Vulnerable Home Improvers

This cohort have a lower income and are motivated by keeping costs down and learning new skills to complete parts of the project themselves.

- I learn skills to complete things myself but I also rely on others for guidance
- I am more likely to rent my home
- I am renovating to improve my experience living in my home
- I complete both smaller and larger projects.
- I understand the hazards of asbestos but, I am not confident in what I know
- I need information about asbestos

Understanding This Cohort

Financially Vulnerable Home Improvers

Cohort Size

6 Home improvers from this cohort took part in the research.

2 Took part in the in-depth interviews.

4 Took part in the focus groups.

Home Improvement Motivation

"Cost is important. I chose to DIY so it would be cheaper"

Behavioural Tactic

Anchoring Bias

Reliance in the first piece of information is particularly important for this cohort. Targeting information through online targeted advertising would be particularly effective for this cohort.

Understanding of asbestos

This cohort had an understanding of the hazards that were associated with asbestos, but struggled to outline the characteristics or risks that could be expected when exposed to asbestos containing material.

Priorities in the home improvement process

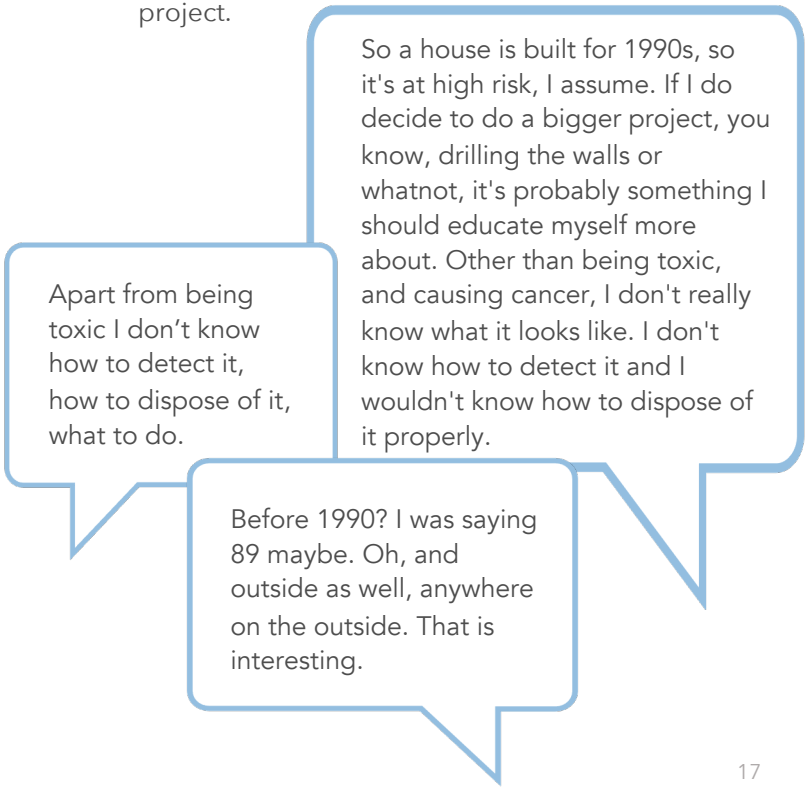
Factors that were most most motivating in their project were:

- Cost
- Ability to learn the skills required to complete the project

Barriers to considering risks of asbestos during a project

This cohort related asbestos material to houses that were much older than 1990.

Because this cohort were unaware of how to detect asbestos-containing materials or the characteristics to look for, the risk of asbestos exposure was not considered when undertaking their project.



Cohort name:

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Home Improvers

This cohort are motivated by final outcome and also learning new skills to complete parts of the project themselves in order to save on costs.

I learn skills myself and also rely on others for guidance

I rent and own my own home

I am renovating to improve the experience of living in my home

I complete both small and large renovation projects

A professional told me about asbestos when I was completing a large project, before that I only understood the risks

I need information and to be reminded of asbestos

Understanding This Cohort

CALD Home Improvers

Cohort Size

4 Home improvers from this cohort took part in the research.

2 Took part in the in-depth interviews.

2 Took part in the focus groups.

Home Improvement Motivation

"I know that with my project if I do it myself I will be saving a lot on costs but it will take me a lot longer because of work… parts that I wasn't aware of I looked on YouTube"

Behavioural Theories

By harnessing the theories from the first two cohorts this group will also be targeted in the messaging.

Understanding of asbestos

Home improvers in this cohort had a range of understanding of asbestos that correlated with both the comfortable urban family and the finically vulnerable cohorts. Some home improvers had a good understanding of the risks and hazards that were associated with asbestos from experience renovating homes where asbestos was present while some had only an understanding of the risks. This cohort relied heavily on the advice of professionals if asbestos may be present during a renovation.

Priorities in the home improvement process

Factors that were most motivating in their project were:

- Cost
- Time
- Safety
- Lack of availability of tradespeople due to the pandemic

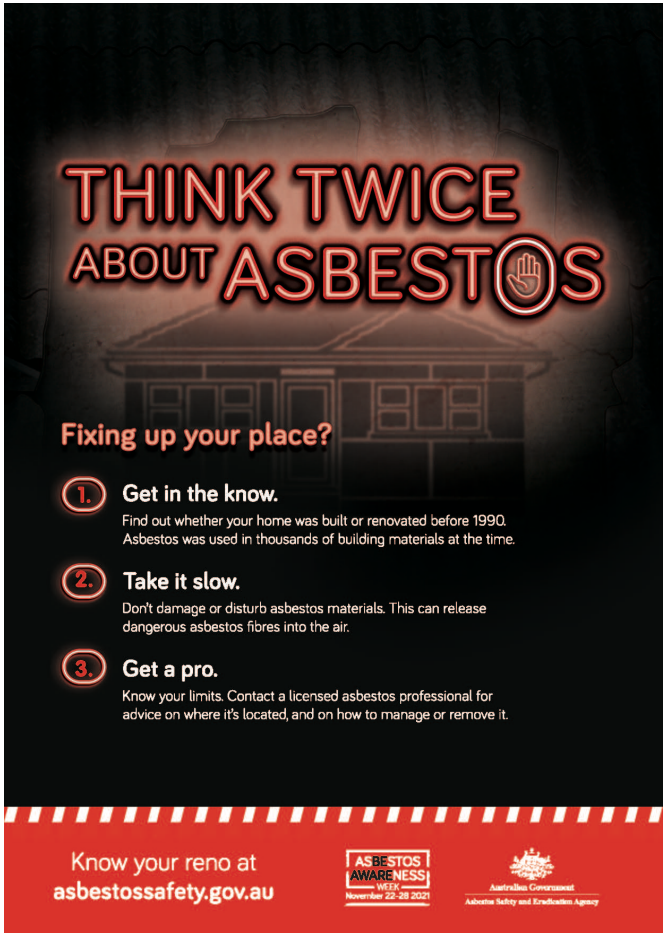
Barriers to considering risks of asbestos during a project

This cohort did not have the same level of historic understanding of asbestos. Similar to the Financially Vulnerable cohort they were unaware of how to detect asbestos-containing materials. For this cohort it resulted in asbestos being detected later in their project and an increased reliance on the advice of professional tradespeople.

Tested Messaging

Tested Messaging

Message 1



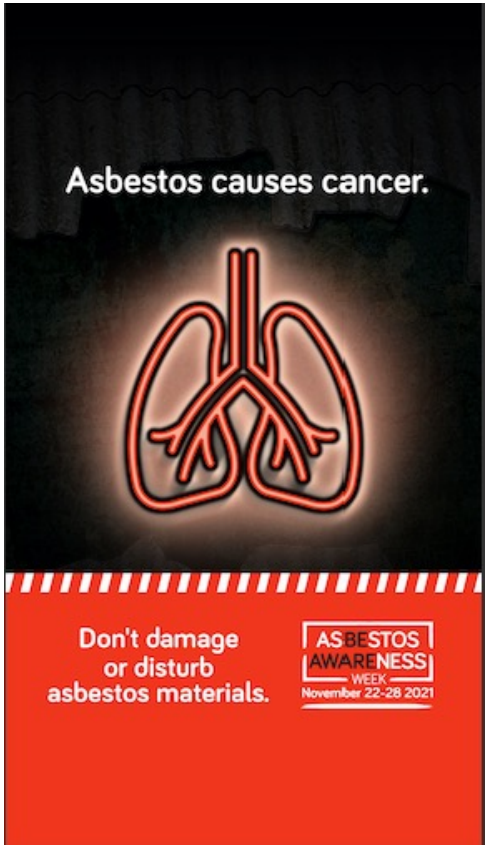
Message 2

Tested Messaging

Message 3

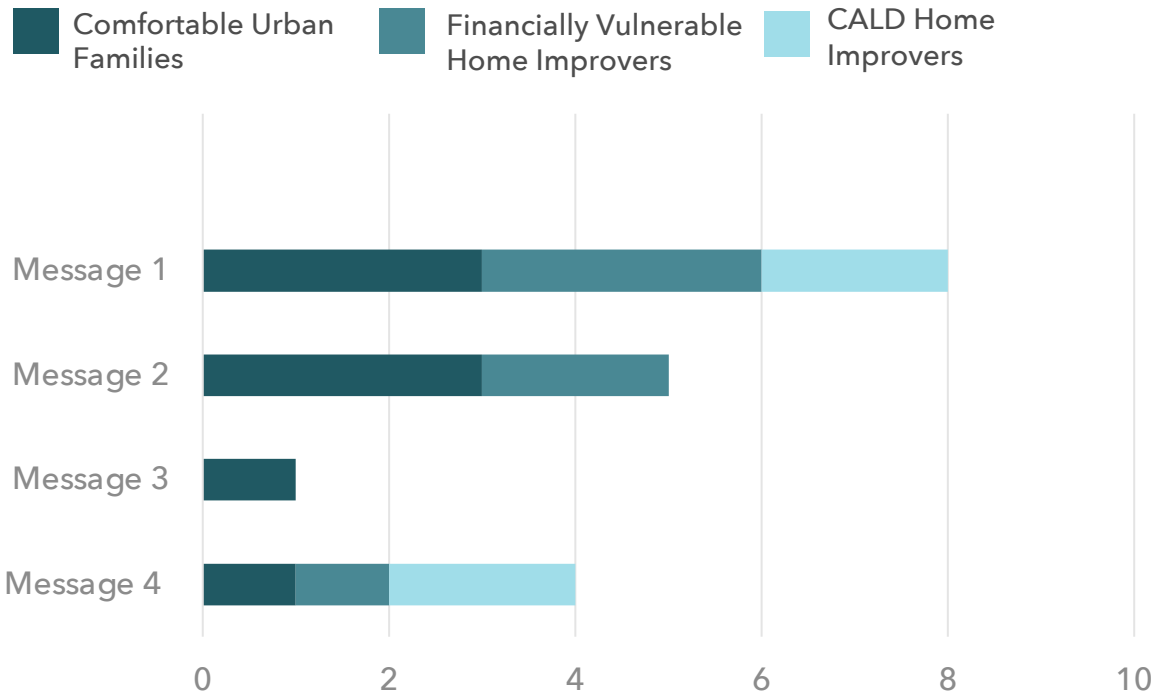
Think twice about asbestos. Before you start any work around the house, check if your home was built before 1990. If it was, asbestos can still be found anywhere inside or outside your home. Call a licensed professional to locate and assess its condition before you start any work. It's just not worth the risk. Find out more at our website.

Message 4



Think twice about asbestos. Asbestos causes cancer. To prevent breathing in dangerous asbestos fibres, always get a licensed asbestos professional to check for asbestos before starting work in homes built before 1990. Find out more at our website.

Response to messaging



Response across all cohorts

Home improvers across all cohorts showed a preference for informative messaging and messaging that showed the implications of asbestos-containing materials to the individual and their health. Participants responded to the authoritative and informative voice in the messaging.

The messaging shown to home improvers who had homes built before 1990 prompted them to question the approach they had taken. It acted as a prompt for home improvers to check their properties to see if asbestos was present for future projects.

Participants had a preference for messaging to be displayed at touch points along their renovation process. Suggested channels of messaging was at hardware stores such as Bunnings, advertised before YouTube videos or renovation shows, and on government and council websites.

It (third message) doesn't look as serious as the first two. It is more that there is a chance that it is in your home.

The last one caught my attention first, simply because it's a bold statement, but it's a powerful message.

Now that I'm at the end of my project, it's not really a concern, but if I had any kind of proper warning about it or potentially being in the home that would have pushed me to get it checked before we started.

Thinking about it maybe I should get the house looked at.

I guess if it had popped up on the YouTube channels, how to DIY just like that on the side.

If it was at the places that I bought my materials from, I'd definitely go out of my way to ask questions.

Response to messaging

Comfortable Urban Families

This cohort was the only cohort that identified with all four messages with the preference being for messaging one and two. As this cohort often completes multiple projects at the same time as they have a reliance on information that is easily accessible and do not require further research.

This cohort has a good understanding of the hazards associated with exposure to asbestos particularly if their home was built before 1900. Messaging should act as a reminder to trigger their current understanding and act on the knowledge they have.

> I think it works with a good reminder. You know, people can get complacent for, this is a good reminder about what to be aware of.

> I liked message one because it gave you the information rather than saying see the website.

Financially Vulnerable Home Improvers

This cohort showed a preference for messages one and two. There was a reliance on messaging that was informative and offered clear steps that should be taken. Highlighting the year that homes were at risk of containing asbestos was particularly important to this cohort.

This cohort were likely to complete further research online and benefited from clear direction on where to access further information.

> Like it said, have a look at houses before 1990, which, you know, there's a lot of those out still and not to touch it as well. Like some people just think nothing of it.

> Probably start Googling and make myself more worried.

> The three steps are easy to follow and easy to explain.

CALD Home Improvers

Home improvers in this cohort had a preference for message one and message four. There was a clear distinction between a preference for information and a preference for reminders relating to the health implications. This cohort required both reminding and informative messaging.

Similar to the Financially Vulnerable Cohort this cohort was prompted to further information if required.

This cohort was also motivated to take action by the health risks associated with asbestos as it highlighted the severity of the risk that may be present.

> I liked the first one because I found it in my house, and it gives a clear roadmap.

> I liked the three steps – I found it quite appealing and the call to action was to find out more.

> I think for me, the, the most salient one is the fourth one, because that's the only one that says cancer.