

**MEDIA RELEASE****Friday, 19 November 2010****ASBESTOS AWARENESS WEEK: 20 – 27 NOVEMBER 2010****thinkasbestos.com.au****Important Reminder to All Homeowners & Handymen - When Renovating or Maintaining Homes, There is No Safe Level of Exposure to Asbestos!**

With as many as one in three Australian homes containing asbestos<sup>1</sup>, during Asbestos Awareness Week (20 – 27 November) and in the lead up to the holiday season, the Asbestos Education Committee aims to educate handymen, women, homeowners and their children about the risks of being exposed to asbestos fibres.

Homeowners, particularly young couples excited about renovating a home built or renovated in the years leading up to 1985 and who are operating on tight budgets, often enjoy doing much of the work themselves. However, many may be unknowingly putting their health and the health of their children at risk because they don't really understand the risks of working with asbestos or knowing where it might be found in and around their home.

Likewise, for building and demolition, to minimise costs homeowners may be living in the home while undertaking the work themselves (such as demolition) or employing their local jack-of-all-trades handyman to finish the job. If removing or working with asbestos without following stringent precautions, renovators, their children, and neighbours are all at risk of asbestos exposure.

During renovations or demolition of houses containing asbestos, asbestos fibres can be released into the air. Extra precautions should be taken to minimise your family's exposure to asbestos fibres. Long-term health risks associated with chronic exposure to asbestos fibres include pleural plaques, asbestosis, lung cancer and mesothelioma.

Professor van Zandwijk, Director of the Asbestos Diseases Research Institute said, "The problem of asbestos diseases is that the diseases we are confronted with today have been elicited by asbestos exposure 20-40 years ago. So our preventive measures of today will finally pay off in the distant future. This is sometimes very difficult to explain to the general public."

Sean O'Sullivan, spokesperson for the Asbestos Education Committee said, "With Australia having one of the highest rates of asbestos related deaths in the world<sup>2</sup> our aim is to ensure that people protect themselves and their families from asbestos related diseases that can kill.

"We want to educate people about the risks of asbestos and encourage them to seek information that can protect them and their families," said Mr O'Sullivan.

Thanks to the efforts of the Union Movement and NSW Government regulatory authorities, general awareness of the issues relating to asbestos disease and safe removal is increasing.

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<sup>1</sup> PREVALENCE OF SELF REPORTED ASBESTOS EXPOSURE DURING HOME RENOVATION IN NSW RESIDENTS

Eun-Kee Park, Rebecca Hyland, Deborah Yates, Paul S Thomas, Anthony Johnson

<sup>2</sup> University of Melbourne Voice Vol. 3, No. 2 (12 May 2008 – 9 June 2008)

However, with DIY home improvements and renovations on the rise, especially during holiday periods, we also need to alert home renovators about where asbestos may be located in their homes, how to manage it, where they can find out more information and learn safe practices when working with and removing asbestos.

People may also not be aware that licensed asbestos removalists are trained to protect themselves and families from asbestos exposure during home improvements and renovations. Unfortunately, there is the common misperception that it is expensive to engage a licensed professional to assess whether asbestos is in your home, how to manage it or safely remove it.

Homeowners accept that they're not qualified to 'DIY' electrics, plumbing and tiling because they know these jobs require specialised skill and regulated safety practices. And yet home owners seem to balk at the cost of retaining a professional asbestos removalist to protect their family for life when the cost can be as little as \*\$35 per square metre (including GST) to remove up to 10 square metres of bonded asbestos and to dispose of it safely and legally.

Another serious issue affecting the community is the unlawful dumping of asbestos products. This not only impacts on the renovator who removes the asbestos, their family and neighbours, but it also poses a risk to the environment and the people who come across it, including children.

"We are saying to the community, this holiday season, be sure you learn about safe management practices and if you find asbestos in your home; Don't cut it! Don't drill it! Don't drop it! Don't sand it! Don't saw it! Don't scrape it! Don't scrub it! Don't dismantle it! Don't demolish it! Don't tip it! Don't waterblast it! Don't demolish it! And whatever you do... Don't dump it!

"Removing asbestos is one job that is better done by a licensed professional. It's not worth the risk!" said Mr O'Sullivan.

Professor van Zandwijk agrees saying that while he very much likes the Australian expression, 'No worries,' he stresses that this wording is absolutely not applicable to asbestos.

To learn more about how to identify and manage asbestos in and around the home or to find out more information on managing asbestos safely, please visit: [thinkasbestos.com.au](http://thinkasbestos.com.au)

To learn more about the Asbestos Education Committee and its membership, and aims please visit [thinkasbestos.com.au](http://thinkasbestos.com.au).

The Asbestos Diseases Research Institute is a supporter of the Asbestos Education Committee. To learn more about ADRI, please visit [www.adri.org.au](http://www.adri.org.au).

## **ENDS**

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\* Prices quoted are estimates only and may vary from region to region and service to service