**Unions NTs submission- Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency Review – Issues and Consultation Questions**

Unions NT is the peak body of 13 Affiliate unions. The Northern Territory is over one (1) millions square kilometres in size. The Indigenous population speak over one hundred (100) different languages. The tyranny of distances, the lake of essential services, poor living standards and a lake of enforcement/compliance puts all Territorians at risk of contracting asbestos related illnesses.

Unions NT has made comment to the terms of reference (TOR) and have provided recommendations that are supported by Affiliates.

***Questions – Current Role Taking into account the national framework for policy and management of asbestos related issues, and the roles and functions of Commonwealth, state and territory agencies:***

*Q.Do Australian Safety and Eradication Agency’s (ASEA) functions, or the way those functions are performed by ASEA, duplicate effort or include activities that would be more appropriately performed by other organisations? If so, which organisations?*

The Northern Territory has considerable issues with Asbestos in city centres and more so in remote communities. There is a lack of education and identification throughout the jurisdiction. It is directly attributable to public knowledge, Regulatory bodies knowledge, available resources, and the proximity of Darwin Port to South East Asian countries. The Australian Safety and Eradication Agency (ASEA) is an unfamiliar agency in the Northern Territory.

**Recommendations:**

1. Staged professional development and training directed to WorkSafe NT; and
2. Have a physical presence in the Northern Territory to provide real time advice/evidence.

*Q.Are ASEA’s activities well targeted to achieve its objectives?*

Northern Territory Aboriginal population speak over one hundred (100) different dialects[[1]](#footnote-1). Aboriginal communities are supported by Government Departments, NGO’s and other community-based agencies. The condition of available housing in these areas is highly prevalent in remote communities[[2]](#footnote-2). These people/workers are exposed to Asbestos on a daily basis, and they have limited knowledge either what Asbestos looks like or the health ramifications exposure poses.

**Recommendations:**

1. Direct remote community visits to identify the gravity of all affected communities;
2. Provide education material/tools in relevant Aboriginal languages;
3. Engage Elders and Traditional Owners to assist with community education; and
4. Recommend prosecution to the Work Health and Safety Regulator.

*Q.What are the Agency’s strengths and key achievements? What are its weaknesses?*

The Agency is hamstrung by the Government of the time[[3]](#footnote-3). Work is being done to consult with stakeholders and efforts are made to formulate plans to eradicate but it is undermined by big business.

**Recommendations:**

1. Policy commitment by Government to eradicate Asbestos.

*Q.Is the Agency doing work outside its functions under the Act? If so, is this work valuable and should it be continued and provided for under the Act, or should it be discontinued/performed by other organisations? If so, which organisations?*

*Q.Is the Agency not doing work that it should be? Are there gaps in the national framework that ASEA should fill?*

*Q.What should the Agency’s role and functions be in relation to the NSP?*

Assistance by stakeholders is provided and articulated clearly in the NSP but these will never transpire due to the perceived cost of eradication[[4]](#footnote-4).

**Recommendation:**

1. More funding toward the eradication of Asbestos in the Commonwealth Budget.

Q,*Is the purpose and focus of the NSP clearly defined in the Act? What amendments would*

*be appropriate?*

*Q.Should the Act continue to prescribe the NSP ‘priority areas’? Should there be more*

*flexibility for new priority areas?*

The priority areas are not stringently triaged. The vulnerability of people is not taken into account and this should be put at the highest priority.

**Recommendation:**

1. Conduct a study/research on community dynamics in the Northern Territory to assess the vulnerability of the people who live in these communities and reprioritise where needed.

Q.Should the Agency’s functions be more specific in relation to, for example: information

sharing, awareness raising, data collection, stakeholder engagement and coordination,

international leadership?

Q.What are the future challenges facing asbestos management and awareness in Australia?

The penalty for Asbestos non-compliance in Australian Law is not a deterrent[[5]](#footnote-5), poor resource management, corporate greed and the rising costs effects the willingness of people to do the right thing[[6]](#footnote-6). Without absolute commitment from all stakeholders Asbestos related disease will continue to kill Australians now and into the future[[7]](#footnote-7).

**Recommendations:**

1. Reduce the cost of licencing/training for the removal of Asbestoses;
2. Subsidise/incentivise correct disposal, identification, and reporting of Asbestos material; and
3. Public advertisements/social media on Asbestos awareness similar to the Road Safety campaigns.

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1. https://nt.gov.au/community/interpreting-and-translating-services/aboriginal-interpreter-service/aboriginal-languages-in-nt. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Remote Australian communities: The asbestos legacy,03-2017, ASEA. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Australian Government response to the interim report: Protecting Australians from the threat of asbestos “*The Committee's interim report on asbestos includes 26 recommendations”* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Barriers, motivations and options for increasing asbestos removal in the residential and commercial sectors EXECUTIVE SUMMARY, Ipsos Social Research Institute 2018. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. NORTHERN TERRITORY OF AUSTRALIA WORK HEALTH AND SAFETY (NATIONAL UNIFORM LEGISLATION) REGULATIONS, As in force at 1 July 2017, Chapter 8 Asbestos. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Barriers, motivations and options for increasing asbestos removal in the residential and commercial sectors EXECUTIVE SUMMARY, Ipsos Social Research Institute 2018. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. http://www.openforum.com.au/the-ongoing-threat-of-asbestos-in-australia/. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)