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AUSTRALIA'S DEADLY ASBESTOS LEGACY: ONE LIFE LOST EVERY TWO HOURS

NOVEMBER IS NATIONAL ASBESTOS AWARENESS MONTH - FRIDAY 27 NOVEMBER IS ASBESTOS AWARENESS DAY 2026

Every two hours and eleven minutes, one Australian dies from an asbestos-related disease caused by exposure to asbestos fibres; that's 11 Australians every day, 77 every week and 333 every month totalling over 4000 preventable deaths every year - three times the national road toll (1,334 September 2026).

Chair of the Asbestos Education Committee, Clare Collins said, "Australia's national asbestos crisis will continue because many remain unaware or complacent of the risks of disturbing asbestos-containing materials (ACMs) found in one-in-three Australian homes.

"Prior to 2004, asbestos was used in the manufacture of a broad range of building and decorator products (over 3000), meaning a large number of 'legacy' ACMs can still be lurking in any home built or renovated before 1990, and in commercial properties built before 2004," said Ms Collins.

"Despite a complete asbestos ban in Australia almost 23 years ago, deaths from exposure to asbestos fibres are rising and will continue to rise due to a lack of education and awareness of the risks if legacy ACMs are disturbed during renovations, demolition or maintenance when people unnecessarily expose themselves to asbestos fibres," she said.

"With around 6 million tonnes of ageing ACMs remaining in our built environment including in one-third of Australian homes, asbestos remains an ever-present danger for those who fail to take the warnings seriously," Ms Collins said.

Recently, the World Health Organization's (WHO) *Asbestos* paper (11 August 2026), reported that all six forms of asbestos are carcinogenic causing a range of cancers including cancer of the lung, larynx, ovaries and malignant mesothelioma (there is no cure), noting that *"Anyone engaging in construction, maintenance and demolition of buildings where asbestos has been used is potentially at risk even many years or decades after the asbestos was put in place."*

The consistent need to grow awareness of asbestos risks was reinforced with the most recent National Asbestos Awareness Survey (2025) that found that while 91% of respondents knew a little bit about asbestos; in general, people reported being poor at identifying ACMs, while only 30% of people said that they could afford asbestos removal.

Cherie Barber, Australia's Renovation Queen™ and Ambassador for the National Asbestos Awareness Month campaign said, "Because there's no known safe level of exposure to asbestos fibres, increasing awareness of the dangers of asbestos during renovations and maintenance, and improving education among homeowners, renovators, DIYers and tradies on what to do to identify and manage ACMs safely in accordance with legislation, is vital in saving lives."

"With Housing Industry Association (HIA) analysis revealing $4.15 billion was spent on renovations in the 2026 June quarter, the highest three-month period of spending since 1974, the lack of public knowledge on ACM identification and the risks associated with disturbing asbestos; together with the current cost of living crisis and rising interest rates; the fear is people could put their lives and the lives of loved ones at risk if they try to remove ACMs themselves to save costs," Ms Barber said.

"With asbestos-related deaths projected to increase, and with so many older homes (one-in-three) containing ACMs, it's vital that those working on homes take the warnings seriously and visit www.asbestosawareness.com.au to learn what they need to know and importantly, only use licensed asbestos professionals to identify and remove ACMs," she said.

Clare Collins said, “Historically, men (such as tradies) were more likely to be diagnosed with mesothelioma than women because they were more likely to encounter ACMs in the workplace. However, these statistics are changing with increased cases of non-occupational exposure particularly among renovators including women.

The most recent *Mesothelioma in Australia Report* from the *Australian Mesothelioma Registry* (AMR) published by the *Australian Institute of Health and Welfare* (26 August 2026) paints a grim picture of asbestos exposure noting that mesothelioma cases have consistently risen over the past 40 years.

Among participants in the AMR exposure assessment who were assessed as having possible or probable exposure to asbestos fibres, 51% reported exposure during major home renovations where asbestos products were present; 39% reported living in a house during renovations; 13% had resided in a fibro home built between 1947 and 1987; and 21% had lived with someone who brought dust into the home.

“Put simply, renovators, DIYers and tradies could be risking their lives and the lives of anyone who may be present including children when ACMs are disturbed or when asbestos-containing dust is taken home on clothes or tools,” she said.

“With cases of non-occupational exposure (only) recorded at 94.1% for women and 23.1% for men, and cases of both occupational and non-occupational exposure recorded at 51.5% (63.3% men and 5.6% women); improving awareness and education while providing practical information on how to manage ACMs safely can help save lives,” said Ms Collins.

Asbestos could be found in any home built before 1990, lurking under floor coverings such as carpets, linoleum and vinyl tiles. It could be in ceiling space (insulation), around hot water pipes, under kitchen sinks, behind wall and floor tiles, in cement floors, in flat and corrugated sheeting in internal and external walls, ceilings, eaves, roofs, fences, extensions, garages, outdoor toilets, backyard and farm structures, chook sheds and even dog kennels. It could be anywhere!

The risks were pointedly clear in a joint study conducted by the WHO and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) which estimated that exposure in the workplace was responsible for over 200,000 deaths globally each year, accounting for more than 70% of all deaths from work-related cancers. A substantial burden of asbestos-related disease also arises from non-occupational exposure.

“Preventing exposure to asbestos fibres is the only way to prevent asbestos-related diseases, and awareness and education are critical, so homeowners should respect asbestos and visit www.asbestosawareness.com.au and avoid asbestos risks by engaging licensed asbestos professionals because the cost could be far greater if they or their loved ones are exposed to asbestos fibres that can kill,” she said.

“With another Australian life lost to asbestos every two hours and eleven minutes, when it comes to asbestos, 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 tip it! Don’t waterblast it! Don’t demolish it! Don’t dump it! And whatever you do… DON’T remove asbestos yourself,” Ms Collins said.

If planning a renovation, before taking up tools visit www.asbestosawareness.com.au because it’s not worth the risk!

-ENDS-

INTERVIEW REQUESTS

For detailed Journalist Notes or to arrange interviews with Cherie Barber or a variety of expert spokespersons listed below and case studies, contact Advocacy Australia on **02 9518 4744**. Email: **media@advocacyaustralia.org.au**
Clare Collins: 0414 821 957 ◆ clare@advocacyaustralia.org.au - Alice Collins: 0414 686 091 ◆ alice@advocacyaustralia.org.au

MEDIA CENTRE

To access asbestos information and resources, images and graphics of asbestos-containing materials or Asbestos Awareness Ambassador Cherie Barber, Australia’s Renovation Queen™, please refer to the Media Centre at asbestosawareness.com.au OR via **MEDIA CENTRE**: https://bit.ly/AsbestosAwareness-Media-Centre

- **RELEASES & JOURNALIST NOTES:** https://bit.ly/AsbestosAwareness-MediaReleases
- **IMAGES & GRAPHICS:** Various images and graphics of asbestos-containing materials (ACMs) or Ambassador Cherie Barber visit**:** https://bit.ly/AsbestosAwareness-Images
- **FOOTAGE: VNR/BROLL -** https://bit.ly/AsbestosAwareness-Footage **PLAYLIST**: bit.ly/AsbestosAwareness-YoutubePlaylist

THE NATIONAL ASBESTOS AWARENESS MONTH CAMPAIGN

Since 2011, Australia's only multi award-winning Asbestos Awareness campaign has been dedicated to saving lives by alerting renovators, property investors, managers and tradies about the dangers of asbestos and providing effective, user-friendly tools and information on how to manage asbestos-containing materials safely at www.asbestosawareness.com.au

To help save lives, in 2026 the Asbestos Education Committee continues the National Asbestos Awareness Month campaign and its long-standing leadership role of providing world-first, user-friendly and freely accessible education resources at asbestosawareness.com.au for those who may risk disturbing asbestos including homeowners, renovators, landlords, tradies, commercial property and regional property owners where naturally occurring asbestos is known.

ASBESTOSAWARENESS.COM.AU

asbestosawareness.com.au is the world's most comprehensive online information source on identifying and managing ACMs with resources for renovators, investors and tradies including ***Asbestos in Homes: A Guide to Identification, Testing and Removal*** video; ***Asbestos 101 for Residential Property Owners, Managers and Tradies; Asbestos in Your Home – The Ultimate Renovators Guide*** video, ***Asbestos Awareness Residential Property Checklist – A Homeowner's Guide to Identifying Asbestos-Containing Materials; Factsheets*** for homeowners and tradies, ***Trade-specific guides; Asbestos Products Database; Asbestos in Commercial Properties and Naturally Occurring Asbestos*** guidelines.

asbestosawareness.com.au provides comprehensive asbestos information and user-friendly free resources:

- **Asbestos in Homes: A Guide to Identification, Testing and Removal (***Video guide on asbestos inspections and removal hosted by Australia's Renovation Queen™ and Asbestos Awareness Ambassador, Cherie Barber)*
- **Asbestos 101 for Residential Property Owners, Managers and Tradies** *(Education resource to help homeowners, tradies and property investors learn the facts about asbestos and how to manage it safely)*
- **Asbestos in Your Home – The Ultimate Renovators Guide** (*Easy to follow video hosted and produced by Australia's Renovation Queen™ and Asbestos Awareness Ambassador, Cherie Barber)*
- **Asbestos Awareness Residential Property Checklist – A Homeowner's Guide to Identifying Asbestos-Containing Materials** (*User-friendly step-by-step guide to identifying asbestos in the home*)
- **Asbestos Awareness - 20 Point Safety Check** (*Asbestos risks and how to manage asbestos safely*)
- **Fact Sheets for Homeowners** *(When, why and how to use Personal Protective Equipment (PPE))*
- **Asbestos Awareness Toolbox Talks** *(10 Toolbox Talks to help employers better inform workers of asbestos risks)*
- **Asbestos Awareness for Young Workers** (*Education resource developed with SafeWork NSW*)
- **Residential Checklist for Tradies – A Tradespersons Guide to Asbestos** *(Identify the product types and locations)*
- **Trade Specific Checklist for Tradies – A Tradespersons Guide to Asbestos** *(Tailored to 23 specific trades)*
- **Fact Sheets for Tradies** *(When, why and how to use Personal Protective Equipment (PPE))*
- **Asbestos Product Database** (*Australia's first comprehensive online asbestos product database)*
- **Asbestos Management for Commercial and Non-Residential Properties** (*Australia's only comprehensive guide)*
- **Naturally Occurring Asbestos – Asbestos Management Plan Guide** *(Australia's only comprehensive resource)*

MEDIA RELEASE SOURCES

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- Cancer Council Australia: Tools Down: New Cancer Data Offers Safety Reminder for DIY Renovators. https://www.cancer.org.au/about-us/news-and-media/media-releases/tools-down-new-cancer-data-offers-safety-reminder-for-diy-renovators
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- Institute for Respiratory Health: Asbestos in Australia Today: Risk, Research, and Future of Care (September 2026). https://www.resphealth.org.au/2026/09/asbestos-in-australia-today-risk-research-and-future-of-care/

MEDIA SPOKESPERSONS

Cherie Barber – ASBESTOS AWARENESS AMBASSADOR

Cherie Barber is widely known as Australia's Renovation Queen™. Cherie is a regular TV renovator, highly sought-after public speaker, author and award-winning businesswoman with her renovating for profit career spanning more than 30 years. Cherie lost her grandfather to asbestos-related disease and has been a dedicated Ambassador for the National Asbestos Awareness campaign to educate homeowners and DIYers on how to renovate homes with asbestos safely since 2013.

Bret Baker JP

Bret Baker is President of the Asbestos & Hazmat Removal Contractors Association of NSW (AHRCA). Bret is a Civil and Environmental Engineer and is the Managing Director of Beasy Pty Ltd with more than 25 years' experience in asbestos removal and demolition. Bret is a long-time industry representative on a number of government asbestos and demolition advisory committees including SafeWork NSW Demolition & Asbestos Consultative Committee and the Asbestos Safety & Eradication Agency of Australia – Management and Removal Committee Member. Bret has presented at state and national asbestos forums on asbestos-related industry issues. Bret is a member of the Asbestos Education Committee for the National Asbestos Awareness Campaign.

John Batty

John Batty is one of the founding members and President of the Asbestos & Hazardous-Materials Consultants Association (AHCA) and Managing Director of EDP Consultants, a global provider of Health, Safety and Environmental Services. John has more than 20 years' experience in asbestos and hazardous materials management and is a consultant to a number of government departments and private organisations. John is a member of the Asbestos Education Committee for the National Asbestos Awareness Campaign.

Clare Collins

Clare Collins is the Director of the National Asbestos Awareness Month campaign and asbestosawareness.com.au. Clare is the Managing Director of Insight Communications, the creators and managers of the Asbestos Awareness campaign since 2011. Working in consultation with government experts and industry leaders, Insight are the creatives behind the multi-award-winning campaign and asbestosawareness.com.au. Insight has presented the campaign to stakeholders and industry leaders in the UK, Europe and Australia. Clare is also the Chair of Advocacy Australia and the Asbestos Education Committee for the National Asbestos Awareness Campaign.

Mathew Klintfält, Asbestos Awareness Advocate and son of the Late Carol Klintfält OAM

Mathew Klintfält is the son of the Late Carol Klintfält OAM who was honoured with an Order of Australia in Queen's Birthday Honours Roll 2015 for her tireless Asbestos Awareness advocacy following her mesothelioma diagnosis. Mathew advocates for the prevention of asbestos-related diseases and is a member of the Asbestos Education Committee for the National Asbestos Awareness Campaign.

Phillip Smith

Phillip Smith is the Executive General Manager - Environment, Health, Safety and Quality at SHAPE Australia and has more than 30 years' experience in the construction industry. Throughout his career, Phil has been a strong advocate for asbestos awareness, education and risk management. He is a member of the Asbestos & Hazmat Removal Contractors Association, the OFSC Industry Reference Group and the National Asbestos Awareness Campaign's Asbestos Education Committee. Phil is committed to supporting initiatives that improve community awareness and help prevent exposure to asbestos-related risks. Phil holds trade, construction, strategic leadership and WHS qualifications and is recognised for his practical approach to safety leadership, governance and organisational improvement.

Joanne Wade

Joanne Wade is the Head of National Asbestos and Dust Diseases for Slater and Gordon Lawyers and is a respected thought leader in advocating for the needs of people with asbestos-related diseases since 1996. Joanne brings a unique credibility and very personal experience to the role, as her father is a victim of asbestos disease, which has led her to a career she is passionate about. Ms Wade was a founding member of Australia's first Asbestos Education Committee for the Asbestos Awareness Campaign aimed at educating homeowners and renovators about the dangers of asbestos.