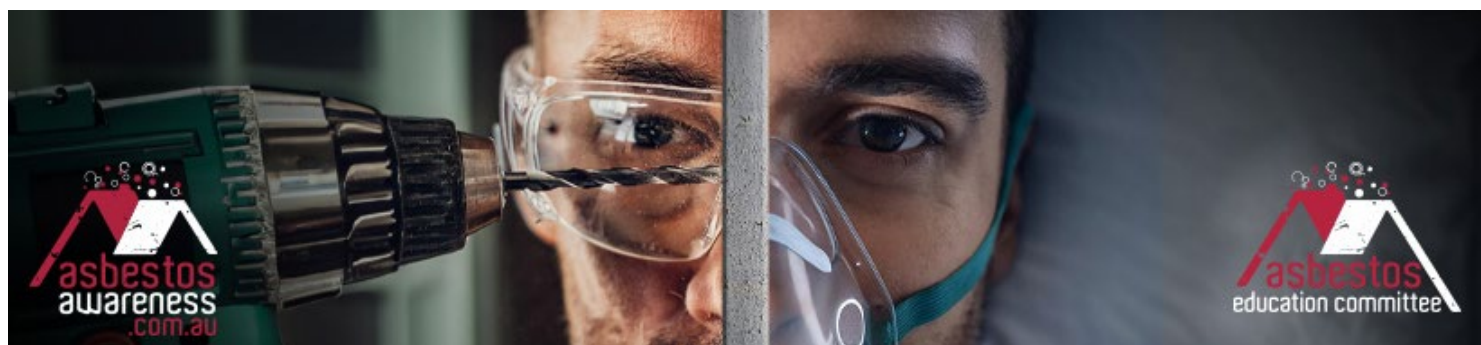




MEDIA RELEASE: 20 NOVEMBER 2025

A CLEAR AND PRESENT DANGER: ASBESTOS AWARENESS WEEK TAKES AIM AT A DEADLY HIDDEN THREAT

Asbestos Education Committee urges Aussies to respect asbestos risks and prioritise safety

ASBESTOS AWARENESS WEEK 20-26 NOVEMBER - FRIDAY 24 IS ASBESTOS AWARENESS DAY 2023

With asbestos recently detected in play sand, and Australian parents fearful for their children's health, the Asbestos Education Committee (AEC) has issued a hard-hitting warning that children could be at greater risk of exposure to asbestos fibres if asbestos-containing materials (ACMs) are disturbed and not managed safely during renovations and maintenance.

Clare Collins, Chair of the Asbestos Education Committee said, "While the extent of the contamination in play sand is yet unknown, renovators, homeowners and tradies must be aware that asbestos, a silent serial killer remains lurking within 1-in-3 Aussie homes and if disturbed, they could be risking their lives and the lives of loved ones including their children."

Every year asbestos-related diseases take the lives of around 4,000 Australians (three times the number killed in the national road toll) with the number of deaths predicted to rise if Australians continue ignoring serious asbestos warnings.

Cherie Barber, Australia's Renovation Queen™ and an Asbestos Awareness Ambassador for 12 years said, "As we've learned recently, the dangers of asbestos are not a thing of the past so it's essential that ACMs are managed safely to protect families.

"Asbestos-containing materials (ACMs) remain an ever-present danger to unsuspecting DIYers, homeowners and tradies who must ensure ACMs are managed safely by learning how to identify any suspected materials by using licenced asbestos assessors or occupational hygienists; and if removal is required, they should only use licenced asbestos removalists."

If sealed and in good, stable condition ACMs don't pose a health risk. However, if disturbed during demolition, renovation or maintenance; and asbestos fibres are released and can be inhaled, those exposed can develop deadly diseases including malignant mesothelioma (there is no cure), lung cancer and asbestosis.

Clare Collins said, "This tragic loss of life caused from exposure to asbestos fibres in the built environment is completely avoidable if Australians learn to respect asbestos risks and learn how to manage this hazard safely.

"There is no known safe level of exposure to asbestos fibres so the only way we can prevent asbestos-related diseases including mesothelioma, is to increase awareness of the dangers of asbestos and ensure its manage safely. It's not just DIYers, homeowners and tradies who are at risk. Anyone who is exposed to asbestos fibres when ACMs are disturbed can fall victim to deadly asbestos-related diseases, including children," said Ms Collins.

"Tragic cases of relatively young Australians being diagnosed with mesothelioma continue to be recorded because of exposure to fibres as children when their parents built or renovated homes using ACMs unaware of the risks," Ms Collins said.

In 2023, when 48-year-old mother of two Leah Smith began struggling to breathe with an unknown illness, she and her loved ones could not have imagined that the tests she underwent on her 49th Birthday would reveal malignant mesothelioma - the deadly cancer caused by exposure to asbestos fibres when Leah was a child.

"When Leah was little, asbestos-containing building and decorator products were popular among young couples when building their own homes, not knowing they could be risking their lives and the lives of their children," she said.

"Sadly, on 22 August 2024, just eight months and one day after Leah's diagnosis, her husband Phillip and their family were left devastated when Leah lost her battle with the terrible but preventable asbestos disease," said Ms Collins.

"What most people don't know is that although asbestos was banned in Australia in 2003, asbestos had been used extensively in the manufacture of more than 3000 building and decorator products that could still be lurking in any brick, fibro, weatherboard or clad home, apartment or shed built before 1990. It could be anywhere," Ms Collins said.

Asbestos is not only in fibro sheeting. It could be in materials lurking under floor coverings including carpets, linoleum and vinyl tiles, behind wall and floor tiles, in cement floors, internal and external walls, ceilings and ceiling space (insulation), eaves, roofs, around hot water pipes, fences, home extensions, garages, outdoor toilets, backyard and farm structures, chook sheds and even dog kennels. It was used everywhere!

Because Australia was one of the highest consumers of ACMs, twenty-two years after the national ban on asbestos came into force (Dec 2003), Australia continues to record one of the highest incidences of mesothelioma in the world.

According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) and Safe Work Australia's Mesothelioma in Australia 2024 report (29 August 2025), over the past 40 years the number of cases of mesothelioma has continued to steadily increase so awareness of the risks of exposure is essential to saving lives.

The report comprising cases of mesothelioma (reported up until 1 May 2025), noted that more than 9 in 10 people who had been diagnosed with mesothelioma and completed an Australian Mesothelioma Registry (AMR) exposure assessment, were assessed as having a history of possible or probable exposure to asbestos.

The AMR noted that while men have historically been more likely than women to be diagnosed with mesothelioma due to occupational exposure, 94% (1,323 of 1,409) of respondents reported non-occupational exposure. 89% of mesothelioma patients (1,176) reported 'possible or probable asbestos exposure' in non-occupational settings. Of these, 51% were exposed during major home renovations involving asbestos, 38% from living in a house while renovations were underway, 13% from residing in a fibro home built between 1947 and 1987, and 21% from living with someone occupationally exposed who brought asbestos dust into the home.

Cherie Barber said, "Homeowners, renovators and tradies who fail to manage ACMs safely, not only risk exposing themselves to the deadly microscopic fibres, but can also expose family members, children and neighbours putting their lives at risk.

"With evidence suggesting asbestos exposure is also linked to ovarian and laryngeal (voice box) cancers and increased risk of breast, stomach and colon cancers; only through increased awareness and providing free practical education tools to help identify and manage asbestos safely, will we prevent asbestos-related deaths.

"Start by visiting. asbestosawareness.com.au, the world's most comprehensive website for user-friendly information on identifying and managing ACMs with dedicated resources for renovators, investors and tradies.

"If a home was built before 1990, before renovating or doing maintenance, be sure to have it inspected by a licenced asbestos assessor or occupational hygienist to identify potential hazards and only use licenced asbestos removalists because the cost to homeowners, tradies and their families could be far greater if they're exposed to the deadly fibres."

"During national Asbestos Awareness Week, the message we want homeowners and tradies to hear is what NOT to do with 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 they do...they should NEVER remove it themselves!" Ms Barber said.

Since 2011, Australia's multi award-winning Asbestos Awareness campaign has been dedicated to saving lives by alerting renovators, property investors, managers and tradies to the asbestos risks and providing effective tools and information resources to ensure potentially hazardous asbestos materials are managed safely.

In 2025 the Asbestos Education Committee continues the National Asbestos Awareness campaign and its long-standing leadership role of providing world-first, user-friendly and freely accessible education resources at asbestosawareness.com.au for anyone who might risk disturbing ACMs including homeowners, renovators, landlords, tradies, commercial property and regional property owners and managers.

-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:

LEAH'S STORY: Please see page 5 of this release for Leah Smith's story.

DETAILED ASBESTOS JOURNALIST NOTES: <https://asbestosawareness.box.com/v/media-releases>

IMAGES & GRAPHICS:

- General asbestos images and graphics <https://asbestosawareness.box.com/v/AsbestosAwarenessImages>
- For photographs of Leah Smith: <https://asbestosawareness.box.com/v/Leah-Smith-Photos>
- Video footage of asbestos products, identification, testing and removal including B-ROLL: <https://asbestosawareness.box.com/v/Asbestos-Footage>

SOURCES

Asbestosawareness.com.au

Mesothelioma in Australia 2025 (29 August 2025): <https://mesothelioma-australia.com/publications-and-data/publications>

HASHTAGS

#AsbestosAwareness #AsbestosAwarenessMonth #RespectAsbestos #RenovationRoulette #RespectAsbestosRisks
#StopPlayingRenovationRoulette #DIY #Asbestos #Renovate #Renovating

ASBESTOSAWARENESS.COM.AU

asbestosawareness.com.au is Australia's leading, most comprehensive, trusted online source of asbestos information dedicated to educating the community about the dangers of asbestos with a specific focus on homeowners, renovators, tradies, commercial property managers and the owners and managers of regional properties where naturally occurring asbestos can be found. **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)
- **[Asbestos Awareness - 20 Point Safety Check](#)** (Asbestos risks and how to manage asbestos safely)
- **[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](#)** (Only comprehensive free resource)
- **[Naturally Occurring Asbestos – Asbestos Management Plan Guide](#)** (Australia's only comprehensive resource)

ASBESTOS AWARENESS CAMPAIGN 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 experienced 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 former 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 the Chair of Advocacy Australia and the Asbestos Education Committee for the National Asbestos Awareness Campaign.

Greg Cummings

Greg Cummings has previously served as Mayor and Councillor on the former Holroyd City Council since 2004. He was elected as the first Mayor of Cumberland since inception in 2017. Greg has been instrumental in the initiation of the Workplace Tragedy Memorial and Reconciliation Day. Greg is a member of 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 Group Executive for Environment, Health, Safety and Quality and Business Technology at SHAPE Australia Pty Limited. Phil has over 30 years' experience in the building industry and holds trade, construction, strategic leadership and WHS qualifications. Phil is a member of the Asbestos & Hazmat Removal Contractors Association and the OFSC Industry Reference Group, and strongly advocates for asbestos awareness causes, industry associations and charitable organisations. SHAPE has a strong focus on asbestos management, education, and awareness, with industry leading asbestos management systems. Phil is a member of the Asbestos Education Committee for the National Asbestos Awareness Campaign.

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.

SPONSORS & SUPPORTERS



LEAH SMITH'S STORY

By Phillip Smith

Mrs Leah Smith - 11 December 1974 – 22 August 2024

Leah Smith was born on 11 December 1974. When Leah was around 3 years old, her mother and father were owner-builders of their home in Gympie, Queensland. At the time, little did they know that most of the building materials they were working with contained asbestos and in the process, these materials were releasing asbestos fibres that could be inhaled.

An inquisitive child, Leah loved to be around her Mum and Dad and regularly pottered around the building site and at the end of each day, she'd help her parents during clean-ups.

This is where we believe Leah was exposed to asbestos fibres.

In 1990 I met Leah. We started courting on 26 September of that year and were then married on 29 April 1995 in Gympie. We have two sons, one born in 1996, the other in 1999. Both were the joy in Leah's life.

It was toward the end of 2023 when our world began falling apart. From August to December, Leah began her struggle with an unknown illness that made it difficult for her to breath amongst other things and she was initially diagnosed as having pneumonia. But even with treatment her condition didn't improve. It got worse.

In November Leah saw a lung specialist who identified some fluid in her lung cavity and he referred her to a specialist surgeon in Townsville to have the fluid drained on her 49th Birthday. 600ml of fluid was drained from Leah's lung and sent for analysis to identify the root cause of her illness. At the same time, they also identified a kidney mass.

On 21 December 2023, we received the devastating call to inform us that Leah had malignant mesothelioma which is caused by inhaling asbestos fibres. It is an aggressive cancer for which there is no cure.

In January 2024, Leah started immunotherapy infusions, but the specialists advised it wasn't stopping the growth and her treatments ceased on 23 April 2024.

We'd been told by Leah's oncologist that the "standard prognosis" for this disease was 7-12 months following diagnosis.

On 22 August 2024, just 8 months and 1 day after Leah was diagnosed, sadly she lost her battle with this terrible disease and we lost a dearly loved wife, mother.

Everyone who knew Leah, knows how much she loved animals, and particularly horses. Leah was extremely well known in our local horse community and one "quirk" of Leahs that she was well known for by family and friends, was that when she wasn't competing, she loved to ride in shorts and a singlet or T-shirt.

In late 2024, to honour Leah's memory and help prevent others from exposing themselves or loved ones to asbestos fibres that can kill; Leah's husband Phil, together with a group of dedicated family and friends created a national event in honour of Leah that we've called, "Ride in Shorts for Leah". They held raffles, conducted an auction and have actively fundraised to support the national Asbestos Awareness campaign and asbestosawareness.com.au.

Together, Phil, his supporters and sponsors have raised \$45,000 in the fight against asbestos-related diseases. Significantly, throughout their fundraising activities in honour of Leah, they have continuously increased awareness of the dangers of asbestos to help save lives.