

QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

SUPPLEMENTARY BUDGET ESTIMATES HEARING : 17 October 2016

IMMIGRATION AND BORDER PROTECTION PORTFOLIO

(SE16/021) - Asbestos - Imported for use in Children's Hospitals in Perth - Programme 1.2: Border Management

Senator Carr, Kim (L&CA 75/76) asked:

Senator KIM CARR: Can you take this on notice for me? Can you give an explanation as to why there was asbestos imported for use in the Children's Hospital in Perth; the 1 William Street Queensland building, which I understand is a Commonwealth site—that is a Commonwealth building, is it not?—and the smelter development at Port Pirie? Can you provide us with advice as to how it is that imported asbestos was used in those particular buildings?

Mr Outram: Of course, we do not manage building construction; nor are we experts in how materials are used in building construction. There are other regulators and authorities and agencies that are involved in construction.

Senator KIM CARR: So you cannot give me an explanation?

Mr Outram: Not in terms of how it is being used in a building site. Our role is at the border, and we of course are responsible for screening and managing the millions of containers and consignments that come through the border. In doing that, we apply a risk based model. So, yes, we look at countries of origin, we look at companies that are sending things, companies that are receiving things and we look for certain kinds of goods as they are described on the integrated cargo system, for example. If that hits a profile alert—and, as I have said you, we have increased the number of profiles by well over 1,000 per cent in the last couple of years—then we will take action; we will inspect the consignment. Bear in mind that we have to also look for guns, drugs and a whole range of other things.

Senator KIM CARR: I can do a comparison on guns if you like, but I am interested to know: can you provide me with any assistance in those three sites?

Mr Outram: We will see what advice we can provide you with, bearing in mind what I said, that we do not necessarily—

Senator KIM CARR: Thank you very much. The other one that has been given considerable attention is crayons. I have mentioned it already. The annual report talks about 307,000 crayons containing asbestos. Are you able to provide the committee with any advice on the country of origin of those crayons and what action was taken to prevent their importation?

Mr Outram: We will provide you with a response on notice in relation to the specifics of that case.

Answer:

Children's Hospital in Perth and the 1 William Street Queensland Building Brisbane

In July 2016, the Australian Border Force (ABF) commenced a number of operational activities in response to the detection of asbestos in building products imported by Yuanda Australia and related companies for use in two building sites, the Perth Children's Hospital and the Executive Building at 1 William Street, Brisbane. Asbestos was detected in composite roof panels that were custom manufactured for the Perth site and in steel brackets at the Brisbane site.

A criminal investigation into Yuanda Australia and affiliates is ongoing. As such the ABF is unable to provide further comment at this stage.

The ABF continues to target all imports to Yuanda related companies and from Yuanda-related suppliers.

Nyrstar Port Pirie

In August 2016, the ABF became aware of the discovery of asbestos at the Nyrstar smelter redevelopment site in Port Pirie, South Australia. The asbestos was in a plaster-like material used to coat the exterior surface of large vessels inside a number of large tower structures on the site. The goods were sourced from a supplier in China. The supplier had declared on all commercial invoices and packing lists that the goods were free of asbestos.

A criminal investigation into Nyrstar Port Pirie Pty Ltd is ongoing. As such, the ABF is unable to provide further comment at this stage.

The ABF is currently targeting imports of these types of goods and suppliers of such goods.

Crayons

The crayons in question were from China and Taiwan.

The crayons were targeted for the presence of asbestos-contaminated talc, and seized at the border when asbestos was confirmed through testing.

The ABF continues to target and assess crayon imports for the presence of asbestos. This is complemented by an industry outreach programme with overseas suppliers and Australian industry.