

Senate Standing Committee on Education and Employment

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE Budget Estimates 2017 - 2018

Agency - Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency

Department of Employment Question No. EMSQ17-004200

Senator Xenophon asked on 30 May 2017 on proof Hansard page 128

Question

ASEA - research required

Senator XENOPHON: You might want to take this on notice because of time constraints: can you advise the research that has been undertaken, the sort of research that needs to be done, in your view, so that you can have the best evidence. On the basis of what you are saying, asbestos-related deaths from mesothelioma and other asbestos-related cancers is several times Australia's road toll at the moment?

Answer

Research undertaken by the Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency (ASEA) is guided by the *Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency Act, 2013* and the *National Strategic Plan for Asbestos Management and Awareness*, which aims to contribute preventing exposure to asbestos fibres in order to eliminate asbestos related disease (ARDs) in Australia.

This requires a variety of research methodologies to better understand asbestos safety knowledge and behaviours, the exposure pathways that contribute to ARDs, forecasting the future challenges posed by Australia's asbestos legacy and quantifying the impact of ARDs in Australia.

ASEA's finalised research includes:

- Benchmarking national asbestos awareness
- Measurement of the release of asbestos fibres during do-it-yourself home renovations
- Projecting the future burden of mesothelioma in Australia
- Attitudes about residential asbestos assessments
- Review of illegal dumping and asbestos waste in Australia, and
- The impact of Australia's asbestos legacy on remote Indigenous communities

These reports can be found on the agency's website.

ASEA's consultation and stakeholder feedback suggests further research that should be done includes:

- The social, health and economic impacts of ARD to inform investment in prevention
- Targeted approaches to changing behaviours, particularly in the residential sector.

This is being considered for inclusion in ASEA's 2017–18 Annual Operational Plan and the next National Strategic Plan.

Safe Work Australia reports that average number of people diagnosed with mesothelioma each year since 2011 is 701 (<https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/asbestos>, viewed: 19/06/17)

There is no available consolidated list of all asbestos-related cancers available. ASEA is currently conducting research utilising data from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare to identify the potential incidence of other asbestos-related cancers in Australia.

This most common form of asbestos-related cancer is generally thought to be lung cancer. The causation of non-mesothelioma ARDs can be difficult to prove due to other potential sources, and researchers use a variety of approaches to identify estimate asbestos-related cancers.

Researchers offer a range of the incidence of mesothelioma to lung cancers is between 1:1 and 1:5. Some international views, when taking into account other asbestos related cancers, report it may be greater than this. Given the uncertainties, further research is required.

At this time, there is no definitive research to identify the incidence of all ARDs in Australia; however, McCormack et al suggest the average ratio is 1:1.9 (McCormack, V., Peto, J., Byrnes, G., Straif, K., Boffetta, P. Estimating the asbestos-related lung cancer burden from mesothelioma mortality. *British Journal of Cancer*. 2012; 106 (3): 575-584.) Emerging international views suggest this may be a conservative estimate.

There are limited direct comparisons that can be made between estimates for the incidence of asbestos-related cancers and the national road toll. This is due to uncertainties in the estimates and lack of verified information available at this time.

The Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development maintains the Australian Road Deaths Database.

More information about this database can be found here:
https://bitre.gov.au/statistics/safety/fatal_road_crash_database.aspx