Managing naturally occurring asbestos: local and state-wide perspectives

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Environmental Health Australia NSW Conference, 2016
Port Macquarie
Heads of Asbestos Coordination Authorities (HACA)

- Department of Industry
- Department of Planning and Environment
- Dust Diseases Authority
- Environment Protection Authority
- Local Government NSW
- NSW Health

- Office of Emergency Management
- Office of Local Government
- SafeWork NSW
Heads of Asbestos Coordination Authorities

• State-wide Asbestos Plan
• Education campaign – Asbestos Awareness Month
• NSW Government funded
• Model Asbestos Policy for NSW Councils & revised 2015 version
• Resources on SafeWork NSW website
Naturally occurring asbestos (NOA)

- Asbestos occurs naturally in some rocks & soils.
- Less than 1% of the NSW land surface is estimated to have the potential for NOA within 10 m of the surface.
- Not considered dangerous when left undisturbed.
- When disturbed, fibres can be released into the air.
NOA & health risk

• The risk of developing an asbestos-related disease varies from person to person & depends on:
  o how many fibres have been breathed in & for how long
  o type of fibre
  o whether you smoke
  o age at first exposure
NOA disturbance

- Asbestos is only a risk if elevated levels of fibres are in the air and these are breathed in.
- Asbestos is not considered dangerous when it is left undisturbed – fibres are not generated
- Prudent actions should be taken where practical to minimise disturbance or reduce pathways for exposure.
- e.g. roadbuilding, quarrying, borrow pits, installation and maintenance services
Port Macquarie Serpentinite is exposed along the coastal strip from Town Beach down to Tacking Point.

Air monitoring was undertaken to provide indicative exposure data associated with passive recreational activity (signposted coastal walk) in the vicinity of NOA outcrops.

Air monitoring during the coastal walk returned results less than the detection limit of the contemporary method for measurement of airborne asbestos exposure and did not indicate an elevated human health risk from the inhalation of airborne asbestos.
This study suggests that tourists and locals walking or jogging along the coastal public path in the vicinity of NOA are not at an increased risk from the inhalation of asbestos fibres.

Council may consider sign posting high foot traffic areas.
Naturally occurring asbestos in NSW

• NSW has three main areas known to have NOA:
  o The Great Serpentinite Belt (near Barraba)
  o The Gordonbrook Serpentinite Belt (near Baryulgil)
  o The Coolac Serpentinite Belt (near Gundagai)

• Minor quantities have been found in metamorphosed mafic rocks and limestone near: Orange, Rockley (Bathurst Regional Council), Newbridge (Blayney Shire Council), Wellington & Broken Hill
Who is responsible?

- NOA disturbed by a work process: SafeWork NSW
- NOA part of mineral extraction process: Dept of Industry
- NOA undisturbed by work practices: Council
- Non-compliance with environmental planning & assessment legislation: Council, EPA, SafeWork NSW
Mapping & guidance available online

• To assist councils, land managers & community
• Mapping of high, medium and low potential for NOA
• FAQs, case studies & three fact sheets – for residing, recreation & agriculture in areas of NOA
• Letter sent to the General Manager of each council
• Councils should include the mapping in their GIS
• All on the SafeWork NSW website (under asbestos)
NOA Forums for councils

- 6 Forums held April 2015 – April 2016 to discuss NOA
- 40 presentations given by 13 organisations
- 117 council staff attended from 33 councils
- 33 of 44 affected councils attended (75%)
- Affected councils can contact LGNSW to host a forum

Samples & microscope demonstrations
NOA video

• Filmed in Gundagai, featuring John Jarratt & staff of Gundagai Council
• Outlines simple precautions to take where practical to minimise potential exposure
Naturally Occurring Asbestos Management Plan

HAVE AN ASBESTOS MANAGEMENT PLAN IN PLACE
PROVIDE PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT
WET DOWN AREAS IF NECESSARY
PROVIDE TRAINING TO YOUR WORKERS