

**ASBESTOS AWARENESS WEEK, 22-28 NOVEMBER 2021**  
***Wittenoom uninhabitable – Continues to Kill***

Asbestos Awareness Week was launched by the Asbestos Diseases Society of Australia (ADSA) in 1985, culminating each year on the last Friday of November with an Ecumenical Memorial Service, to commemorate those who have passed from entirely preventable asbestos-related diseases. The ADSA wishes to thank the Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency, Unions WA, and Master Builders Association for supporting its lifesaving work this year.

ADSA's theme for Asbestos Awareness Week this year is remembering those who have fallen from the deadly asbestos fibres from Wittenoom.

According to ADSA CEO Melita Markey, with the Wittenoom Closure Bill passing through the lower house of the Parliament of Western Australia and with good expectations of it passing the upper house, "it is finally acknowledgement that Wittenoom is a contaminated site, unfit for human habitation".

"With this done, we can now focus our resources on addressing the issues of:

1. A lasting memorial to those who have lost their lives from exposure to the deadly blue asbestos fibres in Wittenoom
2. Wittenoom tourism
3. Wittenoom cleanup

"For many years we have focused on raising awareness of the dangers asbestos exposure to workers and home renovators. Now we are facing a terrifying death toll from the tourists and visitors to Wittenoom over the last 40 years, not just West Australians but also our interstate and international visitors," said Ms Markey.

"Through social media monitoring over the past year, we have discovered that despite four decades of warnings, our younger generation is unaware of the very real dangers of blue asbestos fibres in Wittenoom and the surrounding region."

**"Wittenoom is Australia's worst industrial disaster and it continues to kill," said Ms Markey.**

According to Ms Markey, this Asbestos Awareness Week is especially poignant given the recent loss of Professor Bill Musk AM.

"Earlier this month, we sadly lost our esteemed respiratory specialist and epidemiologist, Professor Bill Musk."

"Prof Musk led the original investigation into the Wittenoom cohort's occupational exposure, providing guidelines to protect workers from deadly asbestos cancers. He championed Wittenoom asbestos research, while big business hoped it would remain a ghost town, along with its residents."

"Prof Musk has been a friend to the ADSA, supporting our work and our members for almost 40 years. He was committed to public health and the role it must play in protecting the life of all Australians."

“In honour of his enormous contribution, we are proud to launch a PhD Scholarship in Prof Musk's name to ensure we continue his tradition of a commitment to workers and public health safety in Western Australia.”

“We need to raise \$360,000 to cover the PhD research costs of a respiratory clinician/scientist over three years.”

The recipient's research will be managed through The University of Western Australia via The National Centre for Asbestos-Related Diseases (NCARD) and The Institute of Respiratory Health (IRH).

**Asbestos-related diseases cause approximately 4,000 deaths a year in Australia, with one person dying every 12 hours from mesothelioma.**

“This more than highlights the need for ongoing, committed Western Australian asbestos diseases research funding to the NCARD and the IRH.”

“Given the number of new cases from non-occupational exposure, it is of significant concern that funding has been cut in recent years,” said Ms Markey.

According to the ADSA, it's important for all Australians to note that it is the microscopic asbestos fibres they can't see that can cause the most harm.

“This is especially true of the blue asbestos in the Wittenoom area. People think if they stay away from the mountains of asbestos tailings or wear a Covid mask, that they're protected – they are not,” said Ms Markey.

As part of Asbestos Awareness Week, the ADSA is hosting its 26th annual Ecumenical Memorial Service in remembrance of those who have died from asbestos diseases - **930am on Friday 26 November at the Redemptorist Monastery, 190 Vincent Street North Perth**. The event will also be live-streamed on Facebook for anyone unable to attend the service - [www.facebook.com/AsbestosDiseasesAus](http://www.facebook.com/AsbestosDiseasesAus).

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**ENDS**

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**For a Screening Appointment, call ADSA on 1800 646 690**

**For any Workplace Concerns, contact WorkSafe on 1300 307 877**

**To donate to the ADSA Prof Musk PhD Scholarship, visit [www.asbestosdiseases.org.au/donations](http://www.asbestosdiseases.org.au/donations)**

**To RSVP to the Ecumenical Memorial Service, call ADSA on 9344-4077 or email [ecumenical@asbestosdiseases.org.au](mailto:ecumenical@asbestosdiseases.org.au)**

**To sign the petition for permanent memorials, visit [www.change.org/WittenoomMemorial](http://www.change.org/WittenoomMemorial)**



## & ASBESTOS DISEASES ADVISORY SERVICE

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### PRESENTS

# ASBESTOS AWARENESS WEEK 1985

Quoting a Kenyan proverb... "We do not inherit the earth from our parents, rather we borrow it from our children".

It could also be said that we are the inheritors of history and our children are the inheritors of our mistakes and our failures.

We have dismally failed in Australia to prevent asbestos exposure in the past, mainly due to the lack of action of our governments and the vested interests of the asbestos industry.

It is as a result of our past failures that asbestos is widespread in our homes, schools and other buildings today.

The Asbestos Diseases Society's main task and the principle reason for convening this Asbestos Awareness Week is to do what we can to blunt the third wave of asbestos disease, which is already beginning and inevitably will be much worse if exposure to asbestos in public buildings, schools and in the environment in general is not reduced.

The Asbestos Diseases Society of Australia (Inc) is a caring charitable organisation providing the following unique services at no cost to the public:

- \* professional and specialist assistance to those who develop diseases due to asbestos, and assistance to their families to cope with their illness;
- \* dissemination of information on the ubiquitous nature and health hazards of asbestos;
- \* promoting research into the early diagnosis and treatments of asbestos related diseases.
- \* stimulation of research into safe alternative products.
- \* providing medico-legal counselling in matters of workers compensation and Common Law damages.

Public support and donations are urgently needed so that the Asbestos Diseases Society can carry out its life-saving programmes to achieve an asbestos free environment.

All donations of \$2 upwards are tax deductible.

Any person wishing to join the Society or acquire additional information, write or phone (09) 444 6699, fax (09) 444 6696.



# ASBESTOS

## What is asbestos?

Asbestos is a natural mineral fibre and comes in three basic forms - chrysotile (white), crocidolite (blue) and amosite (brown).

- Asbestos
- \* withstands heat, corrosion and decay.
  - \* resists many chemicals.
  - \* combines a high tensile strength with softness and flexibility.
  - \* can be combined in a matrix and
  - \* is a good adhesive.

These and other properties make asbestos both extremely useful and extremely dangerous!

## How is asbestos used?

Asbestos is used in more than 3000 products.

Some examples are:

- \* Sprayed asbestos for fire protection, heat and sound insulation.
- \* Lagging for pipes, boilers etc.
- \* Asbestos cement (A/C) products:
  - Corrugated roofing and walling
  - Flat sheet wall lining
  - Compressed flooring and partitioning
  - Downpipe & guttering
  - Pipes
  - Moulded products
- \* Asbestos-containing insulation boards
  - Marine board
  - Fire doors
  - Mill board
  - Fire rating board
- \* Electrical switchboards
- \* Tile cements, caulking and spackling compounds
- \* Asbestos/vinyl floor tiles

## What are the dangers?

Because of the small size of loose asbestos fibres, they can be airborne and inhaled. Once in the lungs, they can cause:

- \* Asbestosis - fibrosis (scarring) of the lungs
- \* Lung cancer - cancer of the airways
- \* Mesothelioma - cancer of the pleura (lining of the lung and abdominal cavity).

All three can be fatal, especially mesothelioma.

There is no treatment for asbestosis and mesothelioma.

In case of lung cancer, surgery and cobalt therapy are used. However most cases of lung cancer are fatal. Your chances of catching lung cancer from asbestos are "improved" if you are a smoker by about 25%.

Research by the Asbestos Diseases Society of Australia (Inc) concluded that:

"There are perhaps 700 or more occupationally related asbestos cancer deaths occurring each year in Australia. The toll is likely to continue at least for the next three decades, even if stringent controls are introduced now, because of the damage caused by past exposure. Further, these estimates do not include other causes of asbestos related death such as asbestosis."

## Is there any safe level of exposure?

NO.

The International Agency for Research on Cancer says:

"It is not possible to assess whether there is a level of exposure in humans below which an increased risk in cancer would not occur."

This applies to all three forms of asbestos.

In view of these dangers, our workplace and environment should be asbestos free.