

Wittenoom...

IT'S NOT SAFE



The death toll won't stop, until the visitors stop.

Do not visit Wittenoom. The area is heavily contaminated with asbestos fibres. www.asbestosdiseases.org.au



MEDIA RELEASE

August 2021

URGENT MESSAGE TO ALL TRAVELLERS TO THE PILBARA REGION OF WA

Please Do Not Visit Wittenoom – It Is Not Safe

The Asbestos Diseases Society of Australia (ADSA) has launched a community education campaign to discourage visitors to the closed mining town of Wittenoom, in the Pilbara region of Western Australia.

“Sadly, we know the death toll from Wittenoom won't stop, until the visitors stop,” said ADSA CEO Melita Markey.

“After disturbing images were flashed across social media of ‘adventure tourists’ playing in the deadly dust of Wittenoom, we decided to monitor this behaviour to develop a communications strategy that would get the message through that there is no safe level of asbestos exposure, especially in relation to contracting incurable mesothelioma cancer.”

“It appears that many people today are unaware of Wittenoom's legacy - that it continues to kill,” said Ms Markey.

Western Australia has one of the highest incidences of malignant mesothelioma in the world per capita. Across the country, one person dies every 12 hours from mesothelioma.

Ms Markey acknowledged that residents and tourists alike are keen to explore the Pilbara especially during wildflower season. Based on our research demonstrating multiple social media posts each week, it is clear that tourists, photographers, campers and even young families, are still visiting Wittenoom on a daily basis.

“The CSR Wittenoom Mine and Mill is the greatest example of workplace negligence in Australia, and second in the world to date. Wittenoom was established as a blue asbestos mining town in 1937. Despite health warnings as early as 1948, it continued to operate until 1966, killing thousands of workers, their families and town visitors.”

Do not visit Wittenoom.

IT IS NOT SAFE. The area is heavily contaminated with asbestos fibres.

The death toll from Wittenoom will not stop until visitors stop.

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“The contamination of town and its surrounding gorges continues to kill Traditional Owners and visitors to the region,” said Ms Markey.

As outlined by the Hon Alison Xamon MLC in her 2018 Parliamentary Speech, asbestos had been used primarily in WA’s building and manufacturing industries since the 1920s. From 1943 to 1966 more than 20,000 people lived and worked at Wittenoom.

In 1993, it was estimated that 40,000 tourists were still visiting the area. This led concerned members of parliament to establish an inquiry into Wittenoom and Tourism. A Report tabled in 1994, by the then MLA Larry Graham, found that Wittenoom was contaminated; 34 recommendations were subsequently made including ‘cleaning up the township and surrounding areas’.

“The report did not gain traction and today the town and surrounding areas are so contaminated, we are potentially looking at new generation asbestos diseases victims.”

“It’s important to note that it is the microscopic fibres that you can’t see, that cause the most harm. 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.

Fibres lodge, in the pleura of the lungs and/or in the gut if ingested, for decades, until mutations occur causing asbestos related cancer.

“These diseases are preventable but for profit, indifference and the lack of corporate governance in allowing CSR to close the mine without cleaning up the environment,” said Ms Markey.

The thousands of victims and their families of the Wittenoom preventable asbestos tragedy have never been formally recognised. The ADSA is currently hosting an online petition for a permanent memorial to be erected in Karijini National Park with the names of the thousands of Wittenoom workers, residents, traditional owners and their family members who lost their lives to asbestos-related diseases.

As the time between initial asbestos exposure and the onset of symptoms is usually 20 to 50 years, ADSA will also be allocating space on the memorials for the hundreds, even thousands, of victims that have yet to be diagnosed.

According to Ms Markey, the memorial will serve a dual purpose:

1. Acknowledgement of the sacrifice of these lives in the desire for WA mining development
2. A meaningful deterrent for those tempted to visit Wittenoom

Do not visit Wittenoom.

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“So these September school holidays, please do not take your family to Wittenoom. There are lots of much safer camping grounds near beautiful gorges and watering holes in the Karijini National Park.”

“If you’re looking for some family fun closer to Perth, the town of York is hosting more than 100 family-friendly events over the two-week holidays and they have spectacular wildflowers on display at this time of year,” said Ms Markey.

To sign ADSA’s petition for permanent memorials in Perth and the Pilbara, please visit www.change.org/WittenoomMemorial.

#

ENDS

For all Media Enquiries:

Estelle Buzzard, Buzz Communications
0437888019 / Estelle@buzzcommunications.com.au

For a Health Check, please call ADSA on 1800 646 690.

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



Petition for Wittenoom Memorials

CSR’s blue asbestos mine and milling operations in Wittenoom WA are responsible for Australia’s worst industrial disaster, causing thousands of deaths. The contamination of Wittenoom and its surrounding gorges continues to kill Traditional Owners, workers and visitors. In 1993 alone, it was estimated 40,000 tourists visited the area. Memorials are essential for the healing of those left behind, as their loved ones are recognised for their courage in battling these deadly diseases and sacrifice in working so hard to develop our wonderful state. These diseases are preventable but for profit, indifference and the lack of corporate governance in allowing CSR to close the mine without cleaning up the environment. We hope these memorials will create a beautiful place for loved ones to reflect and grieve, and act as a deterrent for those tempted to visit Wittenoom.

Please sign our petition for permanent memorials in Perth and the Pilbara.
Visit www.change.org/WittenoomMemorial.

REMINDER: Early symptoms of asbestos diseases often present like a cold or flu, similar to COVID-19. If you think you may have been exposed to asbestos or silica dust and are suffering a persistent cough or ongoing respiratory illness, please contact ADSA for a health check with Dr Deleuil on 1800 646 690.

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dedicated community support, advocacy and public health awareness since 1979
mesothelioma • asbestosis • silicosis • lung cancer

MEMORIAL BACKGROUND:

In 2018, the Asbestos Diseases Society of Australia unveiled a memorial plaque at Solidarity Park, West Perth. The plaque commemorates the 4,000+ West Aussies who have died from asbestos-related diseases and remembers those who were victims of Australia's worst industrial disaster. **The CSR Wittenoom Mine and Mill is the greatest example of workplace negligence in Australia, and second in the world to date.**

Wittenoom was a blue asbestos mining town in the Pilbara region of Western Australia. Despite health warnings as early as 1948, it continued to operate until 1966, killing thousands of workers, their families and town visitors. One of those visitors was the Minister of the Crown Mr Ernie Bridge MLA, who died from mesothelioma, which he contracted during his time dealing with the town's closure. Today, we continue to lose many lives to the deadly asbestos dust from Wittenoom.

"Asbestos has been used in Western Australia since the 1920s, primarily in a building and manufacturing industries. In fact, in 1937 the late Mr Lang Hancock commenced blue asbestos surface mining and used mainly aboriginal people - the Banyjima people - at that mine. From 1943 to 1966 more than 20,000 people lived and worked at Wittenoom. The gorges had regular visitors and various school excursions were held. Notably, Hale School had its own allotted camping area. During that time, thousands of Western Australians attended and lived in that area. Apart from being mined, the asbestos fibre was shipped off with not a great amount of care. It was loaded onto and off ships, which exposed a lot of workers at port Samson and Fremantle port to asbestos fibres. Over the years many of those workers developed asbestos-related diseases." **Hon Alison Xamon MLC, Parliamentary Speech 23/08/18**

While we are very grateful for the CFMEU WA and Unions WA for allowing the memorial plaque in Solidarity Park, our members and friends from Wittenoom have requested a permanent memorial, not just for the workers but also for their children, families, visitors and local Traditional Owners of the land, many of whom have since lost their lives to deadly asbestos diseases. Wittenoom has been taken off the map and cannot be accessed by road; for many this creates a situation where there is not a place of memorial to grieve lost loved ones.

We have approached the State Government about the construction of a permanent memorial in Perth and the Pilbara. We have been advised that the Minister will meet with us to discuss this moving forward. We will also be visiting the Shire of Ashburton and the Traditional Owners of the land to discuss the best way forward in the Pilbara.

We are very fortunate that the artwork for the memorial sculptures (pictured on the right) has been donated, so we only need to cover the cost of the artist and materials, as well as an area for visitors to sit and reflect.



ABOUT ADSA:

The Asbestos Diseases Society of Australia (ADSA) is Australia's leading health and advocacy association assisting persons affected by **mesothelioma - asbestosis - silicosis - lung cancer**. The organisation has played a crucial role in helping Australians affected by asbestos-related diseases since 1979. Our Purpose is to save lives, and Our Values underpin all that we do:

- **JUSTICE** - To ensure access to fair and just compensation, in line with the rest of Australia
- **EQUALITY** - To ensure equitable access to up-to-date medical treatment
- **PROTECTION** - To prevent the community and future generations from exposure to asbestos
- **INNOVATION** - To develop lifesaving treatments through properly funded medical trials
- **LEGACY** - To remember the sufferers and their families

ADSA was founded in 1979 to assist dying workers and their families in their fight for recognition of their asbestos caused diseases, justice and a cure. Furthermore, founders Robert and Rose Marie Vojakovic with the ADSA Committee, saw that asbestos diseases sufferers and their families needed ongoing support medically, socially and emotionally, and so they founded the Asbestos Diseases Advisory Service (ADAS) in 1984. This important service continues today providing screening services, and ongoing medical, emotional and legal support.

OUR SERVICES

Since 1979, ADSA has been helping thousands of Australians and their loved ones access independent advice and assistance for asbestos-related issues, including:

- providing specialist assistance for victims and professional support for their families in the management of the asbestos-related diseases
- fundraising for lifesaving medical research, to find a cure for malignant mesothelioma and lung cancer
- promoting research into early diagnosis and treatment of asbestos-related diseases
- providing medico-legal counselling and assistance with Workers' Compensation and Common Law damages claims
- raising awareness of the dangers associated with asbestos in the community and providing information on safety measures

The Advisory Service also provides:

- assisting with screenings for asbestos-related diseases, which includes low dose CT scans and breathing tests
- medical and legal support
- counselling and support groups
- industrial and environmental hygiene information

Public support and donations have enabled the ADSA to support sufferers, families and carers, as well as fund life-saving programs, medical research and to lobby Government for an asbestos-free environment. All donations of \$2 or more are tax deductible. **For assistance and information, please call (08) 9344 4077 or 1800 646 690, email us at info@asbestosdiseases.org.au or visit www.asbestosdiseases.org.au.**

WHAT IS ASBESTOS?

Asbestos is a natural fibre that was commercially used in more than 3000 products. Australia was one of the highest users, with approximately one third of all homes built using asbestos products. The use of asbestos was phased out of building products throughout the 1980s and completely banned in 2003.

WA has the highest incidence of mesothelioma cancer in the world per capita, owing to the high penetration of asbestos products contaminating our built and natural environment. This is due to CSR's Wittenoom asbestos mine in the Pilbara, and James Hardie's manufacturing operations in Perth. While workers and their families were most at risk of contracting an asbestos related disease in the past, community exposure presents the highest risk today. More commonly, mesothelioma cases are now being attributed to asbestos exposure from 'do-it-yourself' (DIY) activities in the home.

ADSA has seen a considerable increase in the number of cases of mesothelioma, particularly those exposed as children. These cases are described as the fourth wave, affecting a third generation of sufferers - wives and children of mine workers, farmers, tradespeople and DIY handymen.

Progression of Asbestos Diseases from the 1900s

WAVE	WHO IS AT RISK
1st	Asbestos mining industry workers (early 1900s)
2nd	Asbestos manufacturing industry workers
3rd	Construction / tradespeople and their families (ongoing)
4th	Community, due to decaying asbestos products in our built environment – schools, offices, homes, recreation centres, holiday homes (ongoing)
5th	Workers / community, as a result of unsafe asbestos removal (ongoing)

ASBESTOS-RELATED DISEASES

Asbestos fibres that are breathed and in accumulate in the lungs where, over many years, they cause inflammation and other long-term changes that can eventually lead to **mesothelioma cancer**. Mesothelioma develops very slowly - usually 20 to 50 years between initial exposure to asbestos and the onset of symptoms - but can then progress quickly.

In addition, people who both smoke and are exposed to asbestos have a very high risk of **lung cancer** due to the multiplicative effect of the cancer risk by these two factors in combination. Asbestos causes other illnesses such as **asbestosis**, which is a slowly progressive fibrosis or scarring affecting the lung tissue. It also gives rise to pleural thickening which may extend around and constrict the lungs, causing difficulty with breathing and less seriously, causes pleural plaques which appear on chest x-rays as scarring on the pleura.

WHAT ARE THE WARNING SIGNS?

People who may have been exposed to asbestos typically suffer persistent coughs or ongoing respiratory illness. Warning signs include shortness of breath, cough, chest or abdominal pains and rapid weight loss, as well as blood in saliva and mucus coughed up from the respiratory tract. If you think you may have been exposed to asbestos or silica dust and are suffering a persistent cough or ongoing respiratory illness, please contact ADSA's onsite screening service.

Wittenoom...



Urgent message to all travellers to the Pilbara region of WA

Do not visit Wittenoom, not even to take a photo, it is NOT SAFE. The town and surrounding areas are heavily contaminated with blue asbestos fibres from CSR's mining and milling operations. Scientists have established that there is no safe level of asbestos exposure. Sadly the death toll from Wittenoom won't stop until visitors stop.

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