

WESTON CREEK COMMUNITY COUNCIL

- Your Local Voice -

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Established 1991

Minutes

Monthly Meeting

7.45pm 23rd March 2005

Welcome

The WCCC Chairperson, Mr Jeff Carl welcomed the guest speakers, Mr Bill Wood, Chairman of the Asbestos Task Force and Ms Chris Healy from the Asbestos Awareness project team, the Committee and residents. As per normal procedures other business would be after the guest speakers.

Apologies

Zed Seselja MLA, Brendan Smyth MLA, Deb Foskey MLA, Rob Wagg, Mick Gentleman MLA, Juanita Kerec.

Asbestos Awareness – Mr Wood

Mr Wood advised that the new approach to the management of Asbestos in the ACT was through legislation passed by the ACT Legislative Assembly in August 2004.

The asbestos material of risk which is of concern is the strong bonded form. The current campaign has Don Burke who donated his time. Symptoms usually present 30 to 50 years after exposure and the average period is 37 years. Asbestos has been banned from building materials from the mid-1980's, however most Weston Creek houses would have been built pre-1980.

The risk is to tradespeople and the DIY person in working on houses with asbestos materials. The current effort is to raise awareness in people to manage the risks sensibly. In addition it is expected that the approach will have an enduring effect. It was 15 years ago that loose-fill asbestos was removed from roof cavities of houses in the ACT.

Chris Healy continued with a slide presentation on the impact of asbestos. It is a dangerous substance but can be managed. Three out of four people exposed to asbestos will be affected. Although production stopped in the mid -1980's the material is still in houses. There is not a health risk if the material is in good condition and is not disturbed. The usual locations are eaves, electricity meter boxes, wet areas, - walls, ceilings and floors, vinyl floor tiles and under ceramic tiles.

The previous program removed loose asbestos fill from 1066 houses in the ACT. The current work under the Dangerous Substances laws has the aim to reduce future exposure.

The Asbestos Task Force is a mechanism to analyse the extent of the problem and develop the means to move forward with sensible approaches to asbestos management. The Task Force has a community representative and this is Ms Pat McGinn, the Deputy Chair of this Council. The Task Force will report to Government in August 2005. There are a few activities underway simultaneously. It is aimed to survey 700 households free of charge, with an expectation of acceptance by 500 to 600 households. This will provide valuable information on future management practices.

The community attitude to asbestos is also being monitored and less than 10% surveyed indicated knowledge of asbestos in houses. The education and awareness programme is called *Helping everyone breathe easier*.

The attributes of asbestos is that it withstands heat, erosion, decay, fire and is water resistant.

The main diseases from asbestos are: lung cancer, mesothelioma, asbestosis and pleural plaques. There are other asbestos related diseases. The traditional risk groups are miners and those living near mines. The new risk groups are trades people and DIY. The sanding, drilling and cutting of material containing asbestos in the construction of homes is the risk. Inhaling these invisible fibres is the danger. Asbestos has a dose response ratio, there is increased risk with increased exposure, and there is no safe level of exposure.

There is a notification register for asbestos related diseases and the numbers are expected to rise in the future. In the ACT there are 42 persons registered. Mesothelioma is no longer a rare disease. The peak numbers are expected in 2010 at 13,000 Australia wide but possibly 40,000 exposures could be recorded.

The new laws have effect from 4th April 2005. There is a need for home owners to give the information on the use of asbestos, which they are aware of, to tradespeople, tenants and buyers. There is no a need for a professional report, but to advise of the potential risk if known.

The approach is to state what the owner knows, from 16 January 2006 there will be a change to ensure owners and occupiers do advise people working on the house.

Mr Carl opened the meeting for Q&A to Mr Wood.

Q&A

- What is the liability of the home owner who sells the house? A - At present none, but next year this may be different. The current owner's report is to the extent of their knowledge.
- The asbestos approach may be over-reacting, asbestos brake pads are designed to turn into dust, and the National Library had asbestos removed and still has high levels, there are high levels of asbestos in Northbourne Ave. A – Asbestos was banned from brake linings and mechanics may be at a higher risk. This is not over-reacting but raising awareness is important. Measuring asbestos levels in Northbourne Ave is not something we were aware of, we will follow up on this.

- What studies have been undertaken on this approach, that cutting, drilling and sanding is dangerous. How many have died from this type of exposure? A - There has been extensive work on the exposure to asbestos by mine workers and nearby residents. Some work has been done on building workers, the figures are worrying.
- What is the risk to people in Canberra, isn't this a tax on the poor? Why do you require the inspection? A- People interfering with the material, builders and renovators need to be made aware of the potential risk. The National Office of Health and Safety has a recommendation on the safe use of power tools and dust. The risk of exposure is increasing as more people undertake DIY work. Mesothelioma is uniquely identifiable and overwhelming so in the building trades.
- Are replacement materials just as dangerous? A - Not aware of the extent of the danger of the new products, but there is still a need to wear a mask.
- The building trades will suffer, although it is said they need educating, it is the householder who is the victim. A- Not so sure the householder is the victim. This is helping home owners to make tradespeople aware. The register of notification is increasing at an alarming rate, the peak being in 2010. Many of these cases will come from exposure to Asbestos Cement sheeting.
- The current material is not as dangerous as the previous material? A – There is a difference between blue and white asbestos.
- Why haven't the current laws on asbestos removal been enforced? A - Unions are working on this along with Work Cover. It may be DIY people who are not aware of the regulations.
- What was the effect on asbestos when the bushfire burnt houses? A - There was no increase in the detection of airborne particles of asbestos. In the clean up the debris was watered and mask-wearing was required in the removal of destroyed homes.
- I have a concern on a house purchased under Commonwealth law, the occupier is responsible. The ACT Government is now saying the owner is responsible? A- Yes in the future there will be a need for a professional report and this will be a cost to the owner.
- There is an argument that the ACT Assembly passed responsibility for the knowledge to the owner? A - No, the house is always the owner's responsibility.
- Are there enough sites to dispose of asbestos? Are there enough people to inspect? Yes to the first and no to the second.
- Are other States and Territories taking such a heavy handed approach as the ACT Government? A – Other States are watching what the ACT is doing.

Mr Carl called an end to the questions and indicated that the guest speakers were available for informal questions after the meeting. Mr Wood thanked the audience for the challenging debate, new insights and resident's concerns; although in a talking mode the Government is also listening.

Other Business

Submissions

Mr Carl indicated that recent submissions prepared and submitted by the WCCC Committee included:

- Federal Electoral Boundaries Review
- Black spot road submission on Cotter Road / Streeton Drive intersection
- ACT Legislative Assembly Planning and Environment Committee inquiry into DV 244 – Stromlo Village.

These are on the WCCC website (www.wccc.com.au)

Development Application for Rivett Service Station.

Mr Carl indicated that there is currently a DA for the possible redevelopment of the old Rivett Service Station for residential use.

It has been about 4 years since the service station operated; it was for a short time a depot for Lube Mobile. Also, the lessee from the Duffy Service Station operated from the site for about 8 months in 2003.

Rivett Neighbourhood Watch

Barbara Brinton advised the meeting that the coordinator of Rivett Neighbourhood Watch was leaving and a replacement is needed, any resident who is interested please approach the WCCC for the contact details.

Broadacre Estate, Weston

A resident asked of the progress on this study. Mr Carl advised that all was quite and we are awaiting the final report on the site. It was understood that a new site for the New Creation Ministries is near the Kambah Fire Station and the Tuggeranong Community Council is in the early stages of discussions.

Bike paths

A resident asked of the ridiculous bike paths on Hindmarsh Drive and what is the ACT Government trying to achieve as there is already a bike path on this route? Mr Carl indicated that the Committee of the WCCC had discussed this issue in detail at several meetings. The lane width is being reduced to the minimum legal standard. There will still be a problem with the different speeds of traffic (car versus bicycle). The WCCC is intending to write to the Minister on the concerns.

Mr Carl called for additional other business, as there was none forthcoming he thanked the guest speakers and residents for their attendance.

Meeting closed 9.45pm

Next Regular Meeting Wednesday 27th April 2005

Guest Speaker – Mr Simon Corbell MLA Minister for Planning.