



IN BRIEF



Don't risk it

"The Union movement is campaigning to ensure new national OH&S laws are of the highest standard," says UFUA National Secretary, Peter Marshall. "The ACTU is telling the Rudd government that second rate safety is not an option."



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Nasty stuff

Asbestos fibres are 50 to 200 times thinner than a human hair, can float in the air for a long time, be invisible to the naked eye and be breathed into the lungs.



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Exposure

Asbestos related diseases generally come from inhaling asbestos over a long time. But a small number of people may develop mesothelioma after brief exposure. The reason why this occurs is not known.

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The National Occupational Health and Safety Commission (NOHSC) estimates that across a 23 year period to 2010, asbestos exposure will have caused 16,000 mesothelioma and 40,000 lung cancer deaths pic: matthayes / firecall.com.au

Something in the air

Renovations at the Broome Airport fire station have left firefighters exposed to asbestos dust

Aviation Branch firefighters employed by Air Services Australia's Aviation Rescue and Fire Fighting Service (ARFF) at the Broome airport were pleased to learn their fire station was due for a facelift. But they weren't prepared for the exposure to hazardous dust particles that happened when building works got underway.

The airport fire station was set up in an existing aircraft hangar that has exterior asbestos cladding. When renovations began in early September builders holed the plaster board internal lining and exposed noggins and studs covered in asbestos dust

that had fallen off the untreated internal side of the asbestos sheet.

The dust blew around the building for a couple of days leaving firefighters exposed to it.

"As soon as we heard about what was happening, we closed the fire station," says Mick Farrell Aviation Branch Secretary and UFUA National President. "We told ARFF management Members would not be going back into the building until it was safe to do so. We also got Members to record all details of their exposure to the dust."

TESTING TIMES AT BROOME

The Union demanded ARFF test the dust particles within the Fire Station environs, which management promised to do. But they then engaged the asbestos removalist on site to conduct the tests. "This was not sufficiently arms-length for us to be happy about the quality of the work," says Mick Farrell. "So we have officially requested Management, through the Union's lawyer

Slater & Gordon, for an independent test of the entire building by an agreed suitably qualified occupational hygienist."

Until the safety of the fire station is assured, Broome Aviation Rescue Firefighters are working out of another aircraft hangar. Asbestos-related disease is insidious; it can appear after a lag period of 20 years or more.