



IN BRIEF



Warning

The UFUA has issued an asbestos safety alert. "Members must take every precaution in the bushfire zones," says Peter Marshall. "We need Victorian fire authorities to guarantee long-term monitoring of all firefighters exposed to asbestos in the workplace."



InDefenceable

The UFUA has told the Federal Government to immediately stop the Australian Defence Organisation's (ADO) use of white asbestos. Despite being banned in 2003, the ADO can import and use the carcinogen until the end of next year.



Sign Up

The UFUA wants the Rudd Government to ratify the International Labour Organisation conventions on asbestos and occupational cancer immediately. "We're worried about our Members at government sites," says Peter Marshall. "Firefighters run a high risk of contracting work related cancers."

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Asbestos is a widespread menace and danger to firefighters across Australia
 pic: stockxpert

It's out there

Last month's tragic bushfires are a reminder that asbestos is still a real and potentially deadly threat to firefighters

The Victorian bushfires have taken a heavy toll on the community and the firefighters who fought the inferno. "With 173 dead, including our respected colleague, Canberra firefighter David Balfour, the Union is now vigorously working on a submission to the Bushfires Royal Commission," says UFUA National Secretary, Peter Marshall. "The Union is also very concerned about firefighters who were exposed to asbestos when fighting the bushfires."

124 immediate bushfire injury and incident reports have been filed with Worksafe Victoria, but the impact of asbestos

exposure can take years to surface. "It's a terrible injury, because it can remain hidden for decades and then, more often than not, proves fatal," says Peter Marshall.

The Victorian asbestos diseases support group ADSVIC warns that the ferocity of the bushfires has made asbestos dust indistinguishable from burnt timber and other materials. "This means it's a very real hazard for firefighters including those who continue to work in the bushfire zones," says Peter Marshall. "Any structure built before 1990 is likely to contain asbestos, so we consider the threat widespread."

SUPPORT REQUEST

Federal Parliament is considering legislative changes to improve payments and benefits to dependents of Commonwealth employees, including ACT firefighters, who die from a work injury. "Increases to these benefits are long overdue," says Peter Marshall. "They lag well behind what most people would acknowledge as acceptable levels of compensation and support." "With the Senate yet to debate the changes,

we have written to the Government requesting amendments to ensure the needs of ACT firefighter David Balfour's family are adequately provided for," says Peter. "We are asking for the increased benefits to flow retrospectively to the family." David Balfour was a professional Canberra firefighter and active ACT Branch Member who was tragically killed while on strike team operations during the Victorian bushfires.