

## Media Release

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### Building unions draw the line on asbestos safety

The Building and Construction Industry Group of Unions (BCIG) today expressed their deep concern about the occupational health and safety implications of asbestos in the workplace and announced a new zero tolerance policy to prevent workers in the construction and building industries from exposure to asbestos fibres.

The BCIG consists of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU), The Australian Workers Union (AWU), The Communications, Electrical and Plumbing Union (CEPU) and the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU).

According to the new policy, all asbestos in the construction and demolition industries will be regarded as Category Red: material classified as currently dangerous, or posing an immediate risk to health – immediate removal and exclusion of people from the area prior to removal.

The policy outlines procedures for identifying and removing asbestos which include:

- An asbestos audit must be undertaken before the commencement of work on any construction or demolition project and a copy of the audit made available to the BCIG Unions and to Workplace Standards Tasmania.
- If the audit finds asbestos, a licensed class "A" asbestos removalist must be engaged to remove all asbestos containing materials from the site. Air monitoring must be put in place during removal.
- Only when all asbestos is removed from the site will general construction commence.
- In the event that further asbestos is discovered during the construction process, work will immediately cease until removal takes place.

The BCIG Unions will also work with local training authorities and industry training boards to develop an "asbestos awareness" course for current industry participants and the inclusion of a thorough "asbestos awareness" component in all construction industry training packages for apprentices and trainees.

Unions Tasmania, Secretary Kevin Harkins said:

"The presence of asbestos isn't always obvious and protective measures need to be put in place to stop building and construction workers inhaling asbestos fibres."

"This policy will also ensure the possibility of exposure to the general community to asbestos fibres is minimised during and after the construction phase."

"Health and safety is core business for unions and we owe it to working Tasmanians to ensure workers stop being exposed to asbestos at work through pressure to meet deadlines, ignorance, sloppy procedures or bad work practices."

"This policy provides a clear way forward for construction projects in Tasmania to ensure worker and community safety from deadly asbestos fibres."

"Training for apprentices and all those participating in the construction industry in asbestos awareness is vital in keeping them safe at work. We want to play our part in ensuring this training happens," said Mr Harkins.

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