

WorkCover Authority - New Regulation to Tackle the Silent Killer

Over 200 NSW workers were diagnosed with asbestos-related disease in 1995/96 according to the latest figures released by the NSW Dust Diseases Board. In its continued efforts to prevent a repeat of the tragedies associated with asbestos, which has a notoriously long latency period, WorkCover NSW has introduced new requirements to further control asbestos removal work.

The *Occupational Health and Safety (Asbestos Removal Work) Regulation 1996* came into force on 2 September 1996 and affects anyone involved in the removal of friable or bonded asbestos. From 2 September 1996, the following requirements will apply:

- Anyone wishing to carry out friable asbestos removal work must obtain a *friable asbestos removal licence* from WorkCover. A \$200 non-refundable application fee plus a \$1,800 licence fee will apply. The licence lasts for two years.
- A *friable asbestos removal worksite permit* must be obtained for all friable asbestos jobs. A fixed fee of \$500 will apply to all jobs contracted for over \$5,000.
- Anyone wishing to carry out bonded asbestos removal work on areas over 200 square metres must apply to WorkCover to be registered as a *bonded asbestos removal contractor*. A \$100 registration fee will apply. The registration will last for two years. Friable asbestos removal licensees and WorkCover demolition licensees are exempt from this requirement.

WorkCover's Manager of Asbestos and Demolition, Rick Rech said:

"Asbestos is now well recognised as a deadly substance. In introducing this new Regulation, we hope to ensure that only trained specialists will carry out asbestos removal work."

Controls are being further tightened to prevent a repeat of past exposures where the terrible consequences are still coming to light."

Almost 1,000 workers have died in NSW from asbestos-related illness since the problem was first recognised in 1968. In the 12 months from June 1995 to

June 1996, the following problems linked to past asbestos exposure were diagnosed:

- Asbestosis - 28 cases.
- Asbestos-related pleural disease - 79 cases.
- Mesothelioma - 96 cases.
- Asbestos-induced carcinoma - 11 cases.

The latest available total for workers compensation payments made for asbestos-related illness is \$23.22m, paid out in the 12 months from June 1994 to June 1995.