

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

WRITTEN QUESTION

Mrs Lambley to the Minister for Health:

Asbestos in Alice Springs Pathology Building

Positive asbestos levels were found in the Pathology Building of the Alice Springs Hospital on 13th September 2017.

1. Why was the pathology building tested for asbestos levels?

Construction works were planned and as per normal practice, additional investigation and testing for asbestos was conducted within the building.

2. Please provide the full background and circumstances in which a positive asbestos reading was found in the pathology building of the ASH?

As per normal practice, materials were tested in the area and additional asbestos was found. The positive reading was found during precautionary testing, prior to commencing construction works.

3. Was this a routine test or was this test triggered by a particular concern?

This was regular practice prior to commencing construction works, in this instance as a part of the air conditioning replacement in Pathology.

4. Were other ASH buildings tested at the same time? If so, which buildings and what were the results?

At the time the initial testing was undertaken for just the pathology building, as part of the planned work. This testing is common practice prior to construction works going forward.

5. Who conducted the asbestos test at the ASH?

Samples were initially taken by ANT Construction and were tested by the Site Environmental and Remediation Services, which is a National Association of Testing Authorities Australia approved laboratory.

6. How was the asbestos test conducted?

In accordance with the NT WorkSafe *Code of Practice How to Manage and Control Asbestos in The Workplace*.

7. What help and support have been provided to staff, patients and visitors that may be effected by the positive asbestos reading was found in the pathology building of the ASH?

The Asbestos Hygienist, advised that based on results to date there is minimal risk of an asbestos exposure to any person within the working area of the

building above the Occupational Exposure Level (OEL) of 0.1f/mL. This information was passed onto staff and patients.

Staff were invited to an information session where the comprehensive asbestos information was provided on health effects, risks of exposure, and health monitoring. Staff were also made aware of the National Asbestos Exposure Register and were offered to record their details for any future concerns.

A letter was sent to all patients to explain the issue and minimal risk of asbestos exposure.

8. How will the health of these people effected by the positive asbestos reading was found in the pathology building of the ASH be monitored into the future?

Respirable fibre monitoring was conducted internally to the building on 17 September 2017. All results returned a result under the method detection limit of sampling at 0.01f/mL. Respirable fibre monitoring was conducted by suitably qualified and trained personnel with National Association of Testing Authorities Australia accreditation. Based on results to date there is minimal risk of an asbestos exposure to any person within the working area of the building above the Occupational Exposure Level of 0.1f/mL.

All staff have been offered the opportunity to register on the National Asbestos Register for any future concerns.

9. Please provide details as to how and where pathology services at the ASH are currently being provided?

The Pathology laboratory has temporarily relocated and is fully operational in the Liebig Building, on campus at the Alice Springs Hospital.

10. How often are asbestos tests conducted at the ASH?

As required, in accordance with NT Worksafe *Code of Practice How to Manage and Control Asbestos in the Workplace*.

11. How many building within the ASH complex contain asbestos?

All buildings built prior to 2003 are assumed to contain asbestos. Alice Springs Hospital maintains an Asbestos Management Plan and Register, in accordance with the NT Worksafe *Code of Practice How to Manage and Control Asbestos in the Workplace*, and we comply with these requirements.

12. Please provide detail as to where asbestos is contained within the ASH buildings?

Traditionally asbestos is found in multiple different materials. Examples of these materials are used for such purposes as eaves linings, electrical switchboards and floor tiles, in buildings built prior to 2003. An Asbestos Register is maintained in accordance with NT Worksafe *Code of Practice How to Manage and Control Asbestos in the Workplace*. Every building is assumed to contain asbestos unless known otherwise.

13. How much will it cost to remove the asbestos from the Pathology Building? Provide details of quotes and estimates of this work?

Initial costs have been estimated at \$500,000 to \$700,000.

The Department of Planning and Infrastructure has completed the scope of works as of 2 November 2017 to develop the tender for works. The contract will be awarded as soon as possible.

The Department of Planning and Infrastructure has engaged a hygienist to complete air monitoring at the Pathology and Clinic 34 Building site as of 2 November 2017 this will continue for the duration of the project.

14. When will this work be undertaken?

The tender will have a two week closing period, a one week assessment period and will then be awarded with work to start as soon as possible.

15. How will this work be done? How long will it take to remove the asbestos from the pathology building?

The work will be completed in accordance to the NT WorkSafe *Code of Practice How to Safely Remove Asbestos*, by a Licenced Asbestos Removalist and Hygienist. It will take approximately four to six weeks.

16. How is the Hospital managing people who have been effected by or potentially effected by the positive asbestos levels found in the Pathology Building?

Please refer to question 7 and 8.

Site Environmental and Remediation Services advised that based on anecdotal evidence it is not probable that the level of asbestos contained within settled dust represented by the sampling undertaken would procure any disturbance in exceedance of the Occupational Exposure Level as defined within the Workplace Exposure Standards for Airborne Contaminates Date of Effect 18 April 2013 for Asbestos of 0.1f/mL.

17. Has a positive asbestos reading ever been found in within the ASH before? If so, please provide all details?

As indicated in the Asbestos Register and Management Plan, materials suspected of containing asbestos have been identified.

18. Has asbestos been removed from the ASH before?

Yes, it is a common practice to remove asbestos which is managed in accordance to the NT WorkSafe *Code of Practice How to Safely Remove Asbestos*.

19. How many times has the ASH been tested for asbestos levels since it was opened in 1976?

The legislation has changed during the period from 1976 to current. The Asbestos Register and Management Plan comply with current legislation.

20. When was the Pathology Building built?

Circa 1950s.

21. It has been reported to me by former ASH staff that the roof of the ASH Pathology Building collapsed in the early 1990s. What measures were taken at that time to:

- a) **Test for asbestos**
- b) **Ensure people affected by the roof collapsing were tested for possible asbestos contamination or effect**
- c) **Was there an attempt to remove the asbestos from the pathology building at that time**

No measures were required as the section of the ceiling that collapsed was an extension to incorporate the cool room into the building, which did not contain asbestos.

22. What other buildings in the ASH precinct were built at this time? Are these building also being tested for asbestos levels?

Clinic 34, the Liebig Building, Sonder, Old MEB and Gillen accommodation were also built at this time. We have completed additional investigations in the ceiling space in those buildings, with Clinic 34 only identifying asbestos containing material.

This is documented in the Asbestos Management Plan and Register in accordance with the NT WorkSafe *Code of Practice How to Manage and Control Asbestos in The Workplace*.

23. Is it reasonable to assume that all buildings built at the same time and before the pathology building was built, could have asbestos contained in them?

Yes it is reasonable to assume that all buildings built at the same time contain asbestos.

24. Please list all the ASH buildings built at the same time or before the Pathology Building was built.

The Hospital Administration Building, Community House, ADSCA, MGP, Old MEB, Clinic 34, the Liebig Building, Sonder and Gillen Accommodation.

25. What buildings or parts of the Hospital definitely do not have asbestos in them?

The RED Centre, The Emergency Department, Acute Imaging, Baker Flinders and the new Palliative Care Facility.

26. Has a full assessment been done of the whole hospital as to exactly where there is asbestos in the buildings?

Alice Springs Hospital complies with the NT WorkSafe *Code of Practice How to Manage and Control Asbestos in The Workplace* with the appropriate Asbestos Register and Management Plan in place.

27. What percentage of the ASH Hospitals are “asbestos free” and “not asbestos free”?

Without spending a substantial amount of time calculating overall floor space and wall area we are unable to provide an exact percentage.

28. What is the estimated cost of fixing the ASH asbestos problem over the next 10 years and 20 years?

We are not able to quantify this figure, however, removal of asbestos is only required as per the NT WorkSafe *Code of Practice How to Manage and Control Asbestos in The Workplace*.

29. How is the ASH asbestos problem being dealt with internally in terms of the health and wellbeing of staff, patients and visitors? What is your risk management plan?

Alice Springs Hospital continues to manage asbestos in accordance with NT WorkSafe *Code of Practice How to Manage and Control Asbestos in The Workplace*.

30. What is the ASH media and public information strategy for managing this serious asbestos problem?

Media statements have been provided as relevant. Asbestos is managed on site safely and in accordance with the NT WorkSafe *Code of Practice How to Manage and Control Asbestos in The Workplace*.

31. What are the legal issues around the positive asbestos reading was found in the pathology building of the ASH – in terms of public safety, liability etc?

As advised by the Licensed Asbestos Hygienist, based on anecdotal evidence it is not probable that the level of asbestos contained within settled dust represented by the sampling undertaken would procure any disturbance an exceedance of the Occupational Exposure Level as defined within the Workplace Exposure Standards for Airborne Contaminates Date of Effect 18 April 2013 for Asbestos of 0.1f/mL. Asbestos is being managed in accordance of the *NT WorkSafe Code of Practice How to Manage and Control Asbestos in The Workplace*.

32. If it is known that asbestos is contained in other ASH buildings, what is the strategy for dealing with the potential health and safety risks?

Alice Springs Hospital continues to manage asbestos in accordance with NT WorkSafe *Code of Practice How to Manage and Control Asbestos in The Workplace*.
