



Speech by

Michael Caltabiano

MEMBER FOR CHATSWORTH

Hansard Thursday, 2 March 2006

DUTTON PARK STATE SCHOOL

Mr CALTABIANO (Chatsworth—Lib) (5.41 pm): The parents of students at Dutton Park State School are in fear for their children's long-term health and safety following the revelation by Queensland Transport that children at the preschool have been exposed to asbestos dust.

In mid-January, Queensland Transport undertook test drilling at a site adjacent to Dutton Park State School and whilst this drilling was occurring testing was undertaken inside the school classrooms for asbestos. On 3 February, Queensland Transport was given a report of this testing that positively identified the presence of asbestos dust on the kitchen benches, in the ceiling air space and in the general classroom areas.

On Friday, 24 February, moves were made by the government to decontaminate the preschool. There was a full clean-out of the classroom that included the removal of all clothing, hats and other material from the classroom. However, the school community was not notified that asbestos dust had been discovered in the samples taken during testing by Queensland Transport until Monday, 27 February.

With the government's full knowledge, children of four and five years old, together with their teachers and parents, spent 30 days in a contaminated, asbestos filled environment. This level of cover-up by the government is staggering and almost beyond belief. The delay in acting on the consulting company's report showing asbestos is simply unconscionable.

Earlier today, the minister stated that 'action should have been taken much earlier than it was' and that neither he nor the minister for transport considers it appropriate that it took three weeks to get that report from the consulting company. However, this report was delivered to them on 3 February and nothing was done to protect these children's lives until 24 February—21 days of playing Russian roulette with children's lives.

This government has breached its duty of care to these children, their families and local teachers by putting them at the risk of contracting mesothelioma—a fatal and painful disease which causes extreme breathing difficulty and is considered to be one of the most painful ways to die, killing a person over an 18-month period. A doctor cannot test for mesothelioma; these children and teachers will only know if they have the disease when they get the symptoms, which could be 20 years or more from now. These children have an enormous burden to carry for the next three decades.

In my electorate we have four schools with 18 roofs that are asbestos affected—as advised by the minister, the two schools with the worst roofs being Mayfield State School and Whites Hill State College. Local parents express great concern to me about this very old and, in their view, unsafe asbestos product being in the roofs of these schools and affecting their children on a daily basis.

Parents at Whites Hill State College tell me that when you look through the manholes in some of these roofs you can see daylight through the old asbestos that is badly worn and in poor condition. Clearly, this situation needs to be rectified as a matter of urgency—not next year or the year after, but next week or next month. The roofs at Mayfield State School are in the large part unsealed, exposed to the elements and deteriorating on a daily basis.

The Asbestos Roof Replacement Program published on 25 May 2005 has no schools in the Chatsworth electorate scheduled for roof replacement. However, schools in adjoining areas and of the same age have already had their roofs replaced. This government cannot continue to keep its head in the sand over the tragedies of asbestos related diseases.

Time expired.