



Speech by

Hon. Robert Swarten

MEMBER FOR ROCKHAMPTON

Hansard Thursday, 18 June 2009

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Asbestos in Public Buildings, QBuild

Hon. RE SCHWARTEN (Rockhampton—ALP) (Minister for Public Works and Information and Communication Technology) (9.51 am): For 15 years the Department of Public Works has been charged with the removal and management in situ of asbestos-containing material in government buildings. During this time more than \$130 million has been spent making schools, hospitals and office buildings safe for children, teachers, doctors and all government employees and visitors. However, recent events at Caningeraba State School brought the program sharply into focus and warranted my close attention.

I can advise that air monitoring testing conducted by Parsons Brinckerhoff at the school on 5 and 9 June twice returned results that indicated normal ambient air levels. Nevertheless, I have requested the department of workplace health and safety to investigate all processes employed by QBuild during the removal of asbestos material from the school and report the findings to me. I am still waiting for evidence promised by Mr Simon Smith from 5 June and I will ensure any such evidence is delivered to Workplace Health and Safety.

I demand that QBuild maintains the highest possible standard in every instance where it is called upon to remove this deadly substance. The director-general of the Department of Public Works has reinforced this position to all employees. It is timely to remind the House of QBuild's procedures for removing asbestos. At all times QBuild is required to comply with statutory obligations. I am advised that the Built Environment Materials Information Register is checked for the presence of asbestos. Clients are to be advised of the procedures to be followed, including whether air monitoring will be required and all safety precautions necessary. A work method statement is then to be prepared which outlines a step-by-step process for the removal of the asbestos and specifies if personal protective equipment is required to undertake the removal process. I am further advised that an exclusion zone must be identified around the site and appropriate barricading and signage erected. The project should be undertaken out of hours, the site decontaminated and all materials securely wrapped. It is then removed in a vehicle registered to transport hazardous waste and disposed of appropriately at a registered waste facility.

I am informed that QBuild provides a program of asbestos management training for staff. In conjunction with air monitoring hygienist Parsons Brinckerhoff, QBuild developed a comprehensive training module specifically tailored to the tradespeople of QBuild. This practical asbestos training module is state-wide.

As someone whose family has been exposed to the insidious effects of asbestos and has been personally exposed to the material, I will not leave any stone unturned to get the message to the Department of Public Works to reinforce the message to its workers that the treatment of asbestos is to be observed according to the letter of the law so that there is no danger to themselves or anyone else. I will not settle for anything less.