

**Question on Notice
No. 47
Asked on 7 February 2007**

DR FLEGG asked the Minister for Public Works, Housing and Information and Communication Technology (MR SCHWARTEN)-

QUESTION:

With reference to asbestos in public buildings as part of the backing for vinyl flooring-

- (1) Will he estimate the extent of asbestos backed flooring in the various types of public buildings (advised by building type or use if available)?
- (2) How does the cost of and method of removal compare to removing roofing?
- (3) How much has been spent within this department over each of the last three financial years for removal of asbestos flooring?
- (4) Will he release any health or workplace health and safety advice that his department has received in relation to this form of asbestos and its removal?
- (5) What is his estimate of expenditure on removal over the current 12 months?

ANSWER:

In answering these questions I trust Dr Flegg will acknowledge that throughout the broad community, including in his own electorate, there are tens of thousands of private homes and buildings that have asbestos products such as roofs, walls and flooring. No doubt he intends to repeat his ill-informed scare campaign about the dangers of asbestos in public buildings but I trust he will act honestly and knock on the door of every private home and business in his electorate that contains asbestos products and explain the danger as he sees it. I also trust he will acknowledge the tremendous effort by the Department of Public Works to replace asbestos roofing in schools and for its ongoing and successful program of removing asbestos from a wide range of public buildings. While in an ideal world there would be no asbestos products still in existence, his elderly constituents in particular do not necessarily have the money to replace these products and they do not need Dr Flegg causing them unnecessary anxiety in his pursuit of a headline. As Dr Flegg well knows, if treated properly and left undisturbed, there is no immediate danger in asbestos products that are in good condition. One would hope that as the leader of a political party in this State that he would show some responsibility.

- (1) This product was widely used in government and private buildings throughout Australia up until the 1980s. In fact I am advised that many of the older private doctors surgeries, offices and other buildings accessed by the public have this type of flooring.
- (2) The rate per square metre for removal is generally higher for floors as they require a higher level of protection.

(3 and 5)

I am advised it is difficult to provide an estimate of full expenditure as individual agencies, in addition to Public Works, fund asbestos removal under various capital and recurrent programs. Expenditure from the Asbestos Management Program on the removal of known asbestos backed vinyl flooring in 2006-2007 is estimated to be \$2.3 million.

- (4) The most recent workplace health and safety advice regarding this form of asbestos containing material, formally provided to the Department of Public Works and the community as a whole, was through the introduction of the national codes of practice for the 'management and control' and 'safe removal' of asbestos into Workplace Health and Safety legislation in January 2005.