

MEDIA RELEASE: 19 NOVEMBER 2021

Aussie women told 'Stop Playing Renovation Roulette!' as Mesothelioma Deaths Rise by 67% It's not worth the risk!

NATIONAL ASBESTOS AWARENESS WEEK (22-28 NOVEMBER 2021) - FRIDAY 26 NOVEMBER IS ASBESTOS AWARENESS DAY 2021

Aussie women with a passion for renovating are being warned to stop playing renovation roulette during National Asbestos Awareness Week (22-28 November 2021) following new figures released by the Australian Mesothelioma Registry (AMR) on 10 November 2021.

The AMR figures demonstrate a concerning increase in malignant mesothelioma deaths among women with cases doubling between 1997 and 2019 – a significant and worrying increase particularly as women are more proactive in renovating their homes than ever before.

Mesothelioma is a rare and progressive cancer caused by exposure to asbestos fibres. It can take 20-50 years before mesothelioma is detected. There is no cure and the average survival time after diagnosis can be a little as 10-12 months.

The AMR report also noted that between 2012 and 2020 the number of female deaths from mesothelioma increased by 67.74% compared to males who increased by just 9.75%. The age of those diagnosed with mesothelioma in 2020 ranged from as young as 19 years to 101 years, and although a higher number of men were diagnosed overall than women, 93.2% of women attributed exposure to asbestos fibres during non-occupational activities including exposure to asbestos fibres as a result of renovations or living in a home where asbestos-containing materials may have been disturbed.

With Australians ongoing fascination for renovating fuelled by the popularity of home improvement reality TV shows, and with women now playing a significant, active, hands-on role in restoring and flipping properties; serious concerns have been raised that women DIYers might be risking their lives and the lives of their families if they fail to respect the potentially life-threatening risks posed if asbestos is not managed safely.

Cherie Barber, Australia's Renovation Queen™ and Ambassador for the National Asbestos Awareness Campaign said, "In recent years we've seen a huge increase in the popularity of renovating among women and with asbestos fibres used in the manufacture of more than 3000 building and decorator products still lurking in any home built or renovated before 1990, it's vital that women know the dangers of working with these potentially hazardous materials to ensure they're managed safely.

"What most don't realise is that these products are not just found in fibro homes or fibro sheeting. They remain in one third of Australian homes and were used extensively in brick, weatherboard, clad homes, apartments as well as in the construction of fences and garages.

"With the alarming increase in women's deaths from asbestos-related diseases, it's vital that we start to respect the dangers of asbestos and always have older homes inspected by licenced asbestos assessors before taking up tools," Ms Barber said.

If undisturbed, well maintained and in stable, sealed condition, asbestos-containing products are considered unlikely to pose health risks. However, just as electricity can be deadly, asbestos can be equally lethal when invisible fibres are disturbed and inhaled when asbestos is not managed safely during renovations, maintenance, removal or during the demolition of older properties or sheds.

Joanne Wade, a spokesperson for the Asbestos Awareness campaign and the Practice Group Leader/Head of NSW, Victoria and Queensland Dust Diseases Teams for Slater and Gordon Lawyers is a respected thought leader in advocating for the needs of people with asbestos related diseases.

Since 1996, Joanne has seen firsthand, the devastating impact mesothelioma has had on women and their families when they've unknowingly been exposed to asbestos fibres from washing their partner's clothes or been innocent bystanders during work on asbestos-containing materials.

"There is no known safe level of exposure to asbestos fibres. Breathing in asbestos fibres can pose a life-threatening health risk in the years to come. It can cause mesothelioma, a rare cancer, which has no cure. Handling and dealing with any asbestos product unsafely is like playing renovation roulette – you could be the one who ends up with an asbestos related disease," Ms Wade said.

“Why take the risk? Before doing a DIY renovation, get an asbestos survey, have any asbestos removed safely and avoid exposing yourself and your loved ones to asbestos dust and fibres. My message to those wanting to renovate and in particular to my sisterhood is think twice about asbestos and avoid playing renovation roulette,” she said.

The First Wave of asbestos-related diseases affected mainly men. Among women, the primary cause of exposure to fibres was when washing the clothes of their partners who worked in asbestos mining and transport.

The Second Wave (also predominantly affected men) were tradies who worked in transport, manufacturing and installing asbestos-containing products and sometimes workers' wives who laundered their clothes.

However, since a total ban on asbestos came into force in December 2003 and with more stringent regulations in the workplace, the Third Wave of asbestos-related diseases is expected to impact tradespeople and DIY home renovators who disturb asbestos-containing materials when renovating homes built or renovated prior to 1990 when asbestos is not managed safely.

With a staggering 4000 deaths each year from asbestos-related diseases including asbestosis and lung cancer, and an alarming number of deaths from mesothelioma attributed to both occupational and non-occupational exposure during residential renovations; it's clear that both homeowners and tradespersons must start to respect asbestos risks particularly when working on home renovations and visit asbestosawareness.com.au to find out what they need to know to manage asbestos safely.

Amid Australia's multi-billion dollar home renovation boom, the National Asbestos Awareness campaign aims to reduce asbestos-related diseases by urging renovators and tradies to '*Stop playing renovation roulette because it's not worth the risk*' and start to respect the dangers of asbestos just as they respect the dangers of electricity when renovating or maintaining homes.

Now in its tenth year, Australia's longest-running, multi-award winning annual Asbestos Awareness campaign continues to warn homeowners, renovators and tradies of the dangers of asbestos and directs them to Australia's leading, most comprehensive, trusted asbestos information source, asbestosawareness.com.au. Since launching in 2011, the website has had over 2.2 million pageviews and more than 1 million sessions.

With experts predicting a continued rise in the Third Wave of asbestos-related diseases caused from exposure to fibres when renovating or maintaining older properties; the collective data on exposure, together with the data on the current surge in home renovations has raised significant concerns about people renovating homes containing asbestos if the materials are not managed safely by professionals.

Cherie Barber said, “Australians have to stop playing renovation roulette and start to respect the invisible dangers of asbestos by using only qualified professionals for asbestos detection, removal and disposal just as we respect the dangers of electricity and would only use licenced electricians to do electrical work.

“The bottom line is, if you suspect your home may contain asbestos, before taking up tools engage a licenced asbestos assessor or occupational hygienist to inspect your property and if you need to remove asbestos, only use licenced asbestos removalists because it's not worth the risk!” she said.

Stop playing renovation roulette and visit asbestosawareness.com.au - it's not worth the risk!

#AsbestosAwareness #RespectAsbestos #RenovationRoulette #DIY #StopPlayingRenovationRoulette #Renovating #RespectAsbestosRisks #AsbestosAndRenovating #Renovations #WomenRenovators #WomenAndRenovating

-ENDS-

PLEASE NOTE: Please see Sandie Foreman's mesothelioma story on page 4 of this release for a case study.

FURTHER INFORMATION & INTERVIEW REQUESTS

For information and asbestos education resources refer to the Campaign Notes & Website Quick Links on page 3.

For detailed Journalist Notes about asbestos risks and resources or to arrange interviews with a variety of spokespersons including Ambassadors and case studies, contact Insight Communications on 02 9518 4744.

Clare Collins: 0414 821 957 ♦ clare@insightcommunications.net.au

Alice Collins: 0414 686 091 ♦ alice@insightcommunications.net.au

AMBASSADOR PHOTOGRAPHS, ASBESTOS PRODUCT IMAGES & GRAPHICS

For various images and graphics of asbestos-containing materials or Asbestos Awareness Ambassador Cherie Barber, Australia's Renovation Queen™ visit: <https://asbestosawareness.box.com/v/AsbestosAwarenessImages>

COMPREHENSIVE JOURNALIST NOTES: <https://asbestosawareness.box.com/v/2021-Journalist-Notes>

AUSTRALIAN MESOTHELIOMA REGISTRY (AMR)

[Mesothelioma in Australia 2020](#), report published on 10 November 2021 by Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (aihw.gov.au), presents the latest available data from the AMR supplemented by data from the National Mortality Database, the Australian Cancer Database and the National Death Index also states the number of cases for 2020 is expected to rise in 2021 and subsequent years.

INTERVIEWEES AVAILABLE – NOTE: full bios and interviews with health, industry or state-based spokespersons are available on request.

Cherie Barber

Cherie Barber is widely known as Australia's Renovation Queen™. Cherie is a regular TV renovator, highly sought-after public speaker, author and award-winning businesswoman with her renovating for profit career spanning more than 30 years. Cherie lost her grandfather to asbestos-related disease and has been a dedicated Ambassador for the National Asbestos Awareness campaign to educate homeowners and DIYers on how to renovate homes with asbestos safely since 2013.

Joanne Wade

Joanne Wade is the Practice Group Leader/Head of NSW, Victoria and Queensland Dust Diseases Teams for Slater and Gordon Lawyers and is a respected thought leader in advocating for the needs of people with asbestos related diseases since 1996. Joanne brings a unique credibility and very personal experience to the role, as her father is a victim of asbestos disease, which has led her to a career she is passionate about. Ms Wade was a founding member of Australia's first Asbestos Education Committee aimed at educating homeowners and renovators on the dangers of asbestos.

Sandie Foreman, Asbestos Awareness Advocate and mesothelioma patient

Sandie Foreman is a respected advocate in the prevention of asbestos-related diseases who seizes every opportunity to increase awareness of the dangers of asbestos in the community. Sandie was 57-years-old when she diagnosed with mesothelioma in 2016.

Clare Collins

Clare Collins is the Director of the National Asbestos Awareness Month campaign and asbestosawareness.com.au. Clare is the Managing Director of Insight Communications, the creators and managers of the Asbestos Awareness campaign since 2011. Working in consultation with government experts and industry leaders, Insight are the creatives behind the multi-award winning campaign and asbestosawareness.com.au. Insight has presented the campaign to stakeholders and industry leaders in the UK, Europe and Australia.

Associate Professor Thomas John MBBS, PhD

Associate Professor Thomas John is a medical oncologist at the Department of Medical Oncology, Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre in Melbourne. A/Prof John specialises in thoracic malignancies with a focus on asbestos-related cancers and is widely published in the field of lung disease.

John Batty

John Batty is President of the Asbestos & Hazardous-Materials Consultants Association (AHCA) and the Managing Director of EDP Consultants, a global provider of Health, Safety and Environmental Services. John has more than 17 years experience in asbestos and hazardous materials management and provides consultancy services to a number of government departments and private organisations.

Bret Baker JP

Bret Baker is President of the Asbestos & Hazmat Removal Contractors Association of NSW (AHRCA). Bret is a Civil and Environmental Engineer and is the Managing Director of Beasy Pty Ltd with more than 25 years experienced in asbestos removal and demolition. Bret is a long-time industry representative on a number of government asbestos and demolition advisory committees and has presented at state and national asbestos forums on asbestos-related industry issues.

Mathew Klintfält, Asbestos Awareness Advocate and son of the Late Carol Klintfält AM

Mathew Klintfält is the son of the Late Carol Klintfält AM who was honoured with an Order of Australia in Queen's Birthday Honours Roll 2015 for her tireless advocacy to Asbestos Awareness following her diagnosis with mesothelioma. Mathew is an advocate for the prevention of asbestos-related diseases providing personal insight into the impact asbestos had on his mother and his family.

SANDIE FOREMAN

National Asbestos Awareness Campaign Spokesperson & Mesothelioma Patient

Sandie Foreman is a woman of purpose and the source of inspiration to those hoping to put an end to asbestos-related diseases. The mother of two adult children, Harry (32) and Ilsa (31) and the long-term partner of Stuart; Sandie Foreman is a dynamic small business owner who launched her career as a successful mortgage broker following a career in film and television as a highly sought after make-up artist. Sandie is also a victim of asbestos.

On meeting Sandie you'll be immediately impressed by her beaming smile and extraordinary energy, and you could easily be forgiven for thinking that she's a woman that radiates good health. But behind Sandie's natural bubbly persona lies the story of a struggle to survive mesothelioma.

In March 2016, Sandie was an active and seemingly healthy 57-year-old when she experienced a pain in her abdomen and a routine X-Ray showed a lesion on her left lung. Sandie had never smoked, had always lived a fit and healthy lifestyle and had never worked in an environment where she would expect to be exposed to dust that could lead to developing a life-threatening lung disease.

Because Sandie was the picture of good health, her GP wasn't concerned and put the lesion down to old scar tissue from a chest infection. But to be certain, he ordered a follow-up X-Ray. In just three months the lesion had grown to 2.2cm in size and a second 8mm lesion was discovered along with smaller lesions. Although Sandie didn't fit any markers for lung disease and was assured by her doctor that it was still most likely nothing to worry about, he erred on the side of caution and referred her to a respiratory specialist.

Sandie believed that she was an unlikely candidate for respiratory disease and thought the lesion would turn out to be nothing or at least something easily treatable. However, when she returned to the specialist for the biopsy results and learned she'd been diagnosed with malignant mesothelioma with only 6-18 months to live, Sandie collapsed in shock. She didn't expect to be diagnosed with a disease that carried a death sentence. She'd had none of the symptoms of lung disease that one might expect. She didn't have a cough. She'd been exercising regularly with no difficulty breathing and there was no history of lung cancer or any cancers in her family that she knew of.

Unsure if there were any treatment options available to her, Sandie tried to remain positive. At the time her family were dealing with another tragedy so in spite of facing the unknown alone, until she knew more, Sandie was determined not to cause her loved ones any additional worry, particularly her precious children. But the the question remained; what had caused her incurable cancer that only occurs from inhaling asbestos fibres?

It takes a great deal of courage to confront the diagnosis of such a serious, life-threatening disease especially without the support of family, but Sandie wanted to ensure she could give her family some good news with the bad. A few days before starting chemotherapy, Sandie broke the news to her family. "I have cancer but it's ok, I'm starting treatment on Monday". They were devastated. The impact on Sandie and her loved ones was crushing.

Over the next several months with her family by her side, Sandie underwent extensive treatment. She battled her way through five rounds of chemotherapy to reduce the size of the tumours. A year after her diagnosis Sandie was faced with her next exhaustive challenge. In March 2017 Sandie underwent surgery to remove her left lung, pericardium, left diaphragm, part of a rib and the lining of her rib cage followed by 30 rounds of radiation therapy. This was by far the hardest part of her treatment to recover from. So hard in fact, Sandie was half-way through her scheduled radiation therapy when she nearly gave up hope because the side effects were so extreme. The physical and emotional toll on her was exhausting. In the space of a month, she'd lost 8kg, down from her usual petite 55kg frame. It was tough and there were times when Sandie would crawl into bed in the middle of the day and cry herself to sleep not knowing if or how she could go on.

But Sandie didn't give up. She continued to challenge herself, to get up every day and keep fighting, to work hard to remain positive and regain her mental and physical health. With the goal of staying happy and healthy in mind and body, she consulted a psychologist to help overcome the anxiety and panic attacks she'd experienced throughout, and she worked hard with a physiotherapist to regain the flexibility and movement she'd lost as a result of scar tissue induced by her treatment.

It was a long and extremely tough journey. Although Sandie will tell you that she's not the same person she once was because living with a diagnosis of mesothelioma is like living in a shadow; she's grateful that she's still here and there's been no reoccurrence.

So, what caused her cancer in the first place? Eventually the source of the asbestos fibres was found to have been in the ceiling of a corridor at her workplace. Although many other workers from the large organisation frequented the same corridor daily, to date, Sandie is one of three to have been diagnosed with mesothelioma. Sadly, her two colleagues have since passed away from the disease.

Still, Sandie continues to battle on while learning to do things differently and taking each day, one day at a time. With her harrowing treatment behind her, Sandie continues to work hard and exercises regularly walking 5km at a good pace, comfortably. In 2018 Sandie surprised her family and friends by completing the City to Surf to raise awareness of asbestos-related diseases. But Sandie's race against mesothelioma didn't stop there. In May 2019, she helped organise and led the field of hundreds of participants in the annual Meso March that raised awareness of the dangers of asbestos and vital funds for the Asbestos Diseases Research Institute.

Although Sandie is a highly positive, self-motivated woman, there are times when she still feels mentally and emotionally drained. She knows she's one of the lucky few who've had a positive outcome. She's also very aware that the cancer may come back. In spite of knowing that there is no cure for mesothelioma, Sandie is determined to stay motivated, happy and healthy in mind, body and spirit. She is an inspiration to many and does whatever she can to help increase awareness of the dangers of asbestos.

With a sincere passion and commitment to preventing others from exposure to asbestos fibres, in 2020 Sandie became an advocate for the National Asbestos Awareness campaign to warn anyone who'll listen that developing mesothelioma is so random that there is no safe level of exposure to asbestos fibres.

ASBESTOS AWARENESS CAMPAIGN NOTES & WEBSITE QUICK LINKS **NATIONAL ASBESTOS AWARENESS WEEK 2021**

Marking 10 years campaigning in the prevention of asbestos-related diseases

2021 marks 10 years as Australia's longest-running, multi-award winning annual Asbestos Awareness campaign that warns homeowners, renovators and tradies of the dangers of asbestos and directs them to Australia's most comprehensive source of asbestos information and resources at asbestosawareness.com.au where they can learn how to manage asbestos safely. Since 2011, the campaign has won multiple peer-reviewed awards both nationally and internationally and has been acknowledged in medical journals as a leading initiative in the prevention of asbestos-related diseases.

The 2021 National Asbestos Awareness campaign is being conducted wholly in a pro-bono capacity.

Funding for the campaign ceased in 2018 and funding to keep the website live concluded in January 2019. Given the campaign and the website are of national significance, Insight Communications (campaign and content creators and directors) have managed to keep the website live with the support of web developers, I-NEX and creative director, Gemma Waite of Moth Creative. However, to continue the campaign and keep the website current and live beyond 2021, funding is desperately needed.

ASBESTOS.AWARENESS.COM.AU

asbestosawareness.com.au is Australia's leading, most comprehensive trusted source of asbestos information dedicated to educating the community about the dangers of asbestos with a specific focus on homeowners, renovators, tradies, commercial property managers and the owners and managers of regional properties where naturally occurring asbestos can be found.

Since launching on Monday 21 November 2011, the asbestosawareness.com.au website has had:

- ◆ **Over 2.2 million pageviews - Over 1 million sessions - Over 700,000 unique users**
- ◆ Averaged 11,000 users per month in 2021 - a 32% increase on 2020. Each November during National Asbestos Awareness Month it averages a 37% increase on regular monthly users.
- ◆ Averaged 23,231 pageviews per month in 2021 - a 26% increase on 2020. Each November during National Asbestos Awareness Month it averages a 76% increase on regular monthly pageviews
- ◆ Over **1500 downloadable resources** (fact sheets, flyers/posters, graphics, images, AV) have been **accessed over 500,000 times**

Visit asbestosawareness.com.au for information and useful, practical resources including:

- ◆ **[Asbestos in Your Home – The Ultimate Renovators Guide](#)** (Easy to follow video hosted and produced by Australia's Renovation Queen™ and Asbestos Awareness Ambassador, Cherie Barber)
- ◆ **[Asbestos Awareness Residential Property Checklist – A Homeowner's Guide to Identifying Asbestos-Containing Materials](#)** (User-friendly step-by-step guide to identifying asbestos in the home)
- ◆ **[Asbestos Awareness - 20 Point Safety Check](#)** (Asbestos risks and how to manage asbestos safely)
- ◆ **[Fact Sheets for Homeowners](#)** (When, why and how to use Personal Protective Equipment (PPE))
- ◆ **[Residential Checklist for Tradies – A Tradespersons Guide to Asbestos](#)** (Identify the product types and locations)
- ◆ **[Trade Specific Checklist for Tradies – A Tradespersons Guide to Asbestos](#)** (Tailored to 23 specific trades)
- ◆ **[Fact Sheets for Tradies](#)** (When, why and how to use Personal Protective Equipment (PPE))
- ◆ **[Asbestos Product Database](#)** (Australia's first comprehensive online asbestos product database)
- ◆ **[Asbestos Management for Commercial and Non-Residential Properties](#)** (Australia's only online resource)
- ◆ **[Naturally Occurring Asbestos](#)** (Australia's only comprehensive online NOA resource)