



Asbestos Framework Review

Federal

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Master Electricians Australia (MEA) is a peak industry association representing electrical contractors across Australia, majority of which are small and medium sized businesses. We are recognised by industry, government and the community as a leading business partner, knowledge source and advocate. You can visit our website at www.masterelectricians.com.au

MEA commends WorkSafe for undertaking a review of the Work Health and Safety (WHS) framework relating to asbestos management and handling. While asbestos remains a highly hazardous substance to which tradespeople are exposed, it is limited to older buildings constructed prior to 1990. It is therefore essential to maintain a balanced framework that protects safety without imposing undue obligations on workers. In particular, MEA considers it important to enhance support for the safe and compliant disposal of asbestos and to ensure that tradespeople undergo fit testing of respiratory protection when handling this hazardous material.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Tradespeople working with hazardous materials such as asbestos or silica may not be adequately protected if their respiratory equipment does not fit correctly. Improperly fitted masks can fail to provide the intended level of protection, increasing the risk of exposure to harmful airborne particles.

All tradespeople should undergo mandatory fit testing of respiratory protection, including masks, prior to commencing work in a new role or on projects involving hazardous materials. This will ensure that respiratory equipment provides effective protection and reduces the risk of occupational exposure.

Asbestos Disposal

Access to asbestos disposal facilities varies across Australia. These services are managed at the local council level, leading to differences in both pricing and accessibility. MEA understands that some councils provide free disposal for small quantities of asbestos up to specified limits, while others impose charges based on weight or a flat fee.

Where free disposal is not available to tradespeople or individuals who are legally permitted to handle small quantities of asbestos without engaging a licensed removalist (generally up to 10 m² in most jurisdictions), the risk of illegal dumping increases. This most likely occurs in secluded areas

such as bushlands or roadsides. The cost and inconvenience associated with designated disposal facilities can discourage compliant behaviour. Such practices create significant safety hazards, as members of the community may inadvertently come into contact with improperly disposed asbestos.

MEA considers it appropriate for councils to provide free disposal for small quantities of asbestos (up to 10 m²) to encourage safe and compliant practices. In regions with limited financial capacity, where councils may be constrained in their ability to absorb these costs, state and territory governments should consider subsidising disposal programs to ensure consistent and equitable access across all jurisdictions.

Conclusion

MEA supports a WHS framework that balances worker safety with practical obligations for tradespeople. Key priorities include mandatory fit testing of respiratory protection and consistent, accessible disposal options for small quantities of asbestos. These measures will help minimise exposure risks and promote safe work practices, while recognising the operational realities faced by electrical contractors across Australia.

MEA appreciates the opportunity to respond and is available for further discussions.