

Asbestos Policy Implementation – Willoughby City Council

COUNCIL NAME

Willoughby City Council

WEB ADDRESS

[www.willoughby.nsw.gov](http://www.willoughby.nsw.gov.au)

[v.au](http://www.willoughby.nsw.gov.au)

SIZE

22 square km

POPULATION

70,008

Overview

Willoughby City Council adopted its Asbestos Policy on 25th November 2013. The policy was implemented with assistance of an asbestos project group which consisted of key stakeholders within the Council. The assistance and guidance of Local Government NSW was used to understand the *Model Asbestos Policy for NSW Councils* and Council's requirements. After adoption of the asbestos policy, Willoughby City Council conducted Asbestos Awareness training for 75 Council staff in May 2014.

Background

Willoughby City Council's previous Asbestos Policy was adopted by the Council in 2006. This was a publicly available policy dealing with compliance issues in residential settings and dumped asbestos. The previous asbestos policy did not address the safety implications for Council workers.

An internal audit process was commenced in 2012 as a part of Willoughby City Council's Work Health and Safety objectives. This internal audit process found that no asbestos awareness training had been conducted for Council staff since 2006 and there were incident reports of staff finding illegally dumped, orphan asbestos waste in bushland and at council's work sites. Furthermore, most of the Council's procedures regarding asbestos management were in draft form. There were no clear procedures guiding workers on how to engage an occupational hygienist or an asbestos removalist.

The internal audit process recommended that Willoughby City Council's 2006 Asbestos Policy needed to be updated in order to be compliant with the 2011 Work Health and Safety Legislation.

Implementation

Willoughby City Council implemented a new Asbestos Policy on 25th November 2013. In developing the Asbestos Policy, the following steps were followed:

- The Asbestos Project Group was established consisting of key internal stakeholders in February 2013. The key stakeholders included the Building Services Manager, the Compliance Unit Manager, the Project Developer Sustainability and the Environmental Health Officer Project Officer, the Open Space Manager, the Property Maintenance and Construction Manager, the Works Service Manager, the Customer Service Group Manager and the Safety Management Coordinator.
- An initial meeting was conducted and included the following topics of discussion:
 - **Overview:** Asbestos Policy of 2006, current asbestos policy of 2013 and consolidation of public and Work Health and Safety requirements into a single policy.
 - **Overarching document:** *Model Asbestos Policy for NSW councils* – November 2012.
 - **Responsibilities:** The responsibilities for each division of the Council outlined in the following documents: *Asbestos Blueprint*, *How to Manage and Control Asbestos in the Workplace – Code of Practice 2011*, *How to Safely Remove Asbestos – Code of Practice 2011* and the *Model Asbestos Policy for NSW Councils*.
 - **Existing internal processes:** existing practices discussed in the meeting included: educating residents regarding asbestos policy and disposal of asbestos, management of Council lands, managing asbestos waste, regulatory responsibilities of Council and responsibilities to council staff.
 - **Asbestos register.**
- Willoughby City Council was the first council to host an Asbestos Management Training Workshop delivered by Local Government NSW and the NSW Government in April 2013. This was attended by 18 Willoughby City Council staff and staff from 11 other councils.
- The assistance and guidance of Local Government NSW was obtained during the development of Willoughby City Council's Asbestos Policy especially in understanding the *Model Asbestos Policy for NSW Councils*.
- An implementation plan was developed detailing how the Asbestos Policy would be implemented.
- The Asbestos Policy was adopted on 25th November 2013 and uploaded to the Council website (for the public) and the intranet (for Council staff) in December 2013.

Outcomes

Since the implementation of its Asbestos Policy, Willoughby City Council has conducted Asbestos Awareness Training for staff directly affected by asbestos in their workplace. The training was developed by the Northern Sydney Institute of TAFE to suit the needs of Willoughby City Council, for example, Council requested that the training include the Asbestos Policy and internal processes.

In May 2014, 75 Willoughby City Council staff members were trained on the following topics: history and types of asbestos, health impacts, risks, hazards, removals, legislation and council policy, and testing and sampling.

The benefit of this training for Council was the practical application of the policy for Council and the willingness of the training organisation to reference Council requirements.

After the training, staff decided to:

- Review Council's Health Monitoring Policy and set up baseline testing of workers
- Review internal procedures to include barricading processes
- Develop an educational program for residents
- Determine other asbestos training needs
- Develop a Council policy for engaging contractors for asbestos removal and prohibiting staff from touching or removing asbestos
- Review the Asbestos Blueprint for scenarios that could be used as a resource for staff.

Key Learnings

Key lessons for other councils:

- Importance of taking a coherent Council approach to review and implement the Asbestos Policy. Since the Asbestos Policy is a policy that affects nearly all Divisions, ownership is required by all persons responsible for ensuring the safety of workers in the workplace.
- Formation of a project group, allocation of responsibilities and agreed outcomes is very important.
- Usage of Council's internal systems and the right people to drive the policy to realisation; including Training department, WHS and or Risk Coordinator, Compliance, Sustainability team, Waste Management team, Infrastructure (depending on your Council's structure).
- Development of a clear implementation plan and formulation of effective ways to communicate the policy to staff and the residents in your LGA.
- Staying on track and gaining momentum through the engagement of a training organisation that understands Council's requirements and obligations. Initiate Awareness Training as soon as your Policy is implemented. Work Health and Safety legislation can be used to assist implementation of the Council's Asbestos policy.

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