The taskforce

A Queensland Government taskforce is investigating the concerns of residents living near the former Wunderlich factory on Prospect Avenue, Gaythorne. Given the factory closed more than 30 years ago the current risk to the community is expected to be very low.

However, following media reports about a similar factory in Victoria, the State Government has launched an investigation to determine any risks and if so, the action required. The investigation will review the history of the site, examine possible asbestos related illnesses in current and former residents of the area and conduct surface testing and air monitoring in selected homes to see if there is any risk to current residents.

Asbestos

Asbestos fibres exist in the environment from natural and man-made sources and may be found on any property in Queensland. Asbestos was used in a wide variety of residential, commercial and industrial buildings until the late 1980s.

Materials include sheeting, pipes and gutters, vinyl flooring, gaskets and insulation material. Building materials made after 1990 are unlikely to contain asbestos. The manufacture and sale of all forms of asbestos was banned nationally from 31 December 2003.

Asbestos presents a health risk only when asbestos fibres are in the air and are breathed in by people.

Asbestos in the soil

The risk of exposure to asbestos on the soil depends on the amount of material, the potential for disturbance and the release of asbestos fibres into the air. If it is buried it does not present a risk.

Any deposited asbestos will have diminished considerably with the passage of time and weather conditions. The risk from asbestos in soil is generally low.

Asbestos in the roof cavity

The investigation will determine if asbestos fibres in roof cavities pose a risk. This will include a combination of testing of dust in rooves and airborne monitoring in living areas. Any materials containing asbestos that are intact, well maintained and undisturbed are not considered a risk.

Health

The people most at risk traditionally include those who worked with asbestos such as factory workers, builders and tradespeople.

The risk to those who have not had exposure to high concentrations of airborne asbestos fibres is low.

When maintenance, removal, renovation and demolition activities are conducted, there is potential for increased risk to those in the immediate vicinity if asbestos materials are not handled safely.
Current or former residents concerned about their health should call 13 HEALTH (13 432584) or consult their local GP.

Information about asbestos, associated health risks and this investigation can be found at www.health.qld.gov.au/asbestos.

**Future**

The risk of exposure for tradespeople and home renovators and their families is possible as old buildings are renovated or demolished. The Queensland Government provides information for homeowners, builders and businesses on how to safely handle asbestos. Go to www.qld.gov.au/asbestos.

Workplace Health and Safety Queensland and Queensland Health have clear requirements for businesses and homeowners handling asbestos. If you are concerned a business is not handling asbestos safely, please contact Workplace Health and Safety Queensland on 1300 369 915.

If you are concerned a homeowner is not handling asbestos safely, please contact Brisbane City Council on (07) 3403 8888.