Investigation into asbestos exposure and asbestos-related disease surrounding the Wunderlich plant in Gaythorne and the James Hardie fibrolite plant in Newstead, Brisbane.

Purpose

The purpose of this investigation is to determine if there are any ongoing health risks for residents living in proximity to the site of the Wunderlich asbestos plant at 51-53 Prospect Road, Gaythorne or the site of the James Hardie fibrolite plant on the corner of Longland and Ann Streets, Newstead.

Scope

The scope of this investigation is to:

- Examine current asbestos exposure for people living near the sites of the Wunderlich asbestos plant, Gaythorne and the James Hardie fibrolite plant, Newstead; and
- Establish the history of the sites, including historical practices that may have led to community exposure to asbestos, and their subsequent management as contaminated sites;
- Examine the likely exposure to asbestos in the community from the asbestos plants by reviewing relevant literature which assesses asbestos exposure levels around similar plants and review of other identified sources of information relating risk of exposure to asbestos to distance from an asbestos plant;
- Establish as far as possible the epidemiology of asbestos-related disease near the Wunderlich asbestos plant, Gaythorne and the James Hardie fibrolite plant, Newstead;
- Undertake community engagement and consultation with possible exposed community members;
- Make recommendations on health protection or mitigation measures to manage ongoing risks from past practices to appropriate agencies and the community.

Background of Investigation

The Wunderlich asbestos plant in Gaythorne operated from 1936 until the early 1980’s, while the James Hardie fibrolite plant in Newstead operated from the mid-1930’s until it’s closure in 1983.

The has been extensive media coverage of the Wunderlich asbestos plant in Sunshine, Victoria as well as related community concern, following the release of an investigative report by a media outlet. As a result the Office of the Chief Health Officer, Victorian Department of Health, is currently undertaking an urgent investigation to examine issues related to asbestos exposure from the Wunderlich asbestos factory in Sunshine.

The Courier Mail, 27 October 2014, contained media reports relating to asbestos exposure and asbestos-related disease linked to the Wunderlich asbestos plant in Bellevue Avenue, Gaythorne.
**Multi-Agency Working Group Membership**

A multi-agency working group, led by the Department of Health, will be assembled to undertake this investigation. It will include staff from:

- Health Protection Unit, Department of Health
- Metro North Public Health Unit, Metro North Hospital and Health Service
- Thoracic physician (Dr Fong), The Prince Charles Hospital and Health Service
- Brisbane City Council planning
- Asbestos Unit, Department of Justice and Attorney General
- Contaminated land group, Department of Environment and Heritage Protection

Consultation will also be undertaken with the Inter-agency Asbestos Group, Legal Unit and other internal and external parties as required.

**Conduct of the Investigation**

It is planned that this investigation will be undertaken in two phases.

**Phase 1** will involve:

- Epidemiological investigation of asbestos-related disease near the Wunderlich asbestos plant, Gaythorne and the James Hardie fibrolite plant, Newstead (initial report within seven (7) days);
- Preliminary information gathering including examination of the history of the sites, including historical practices that may have led to community exposure to asbestos;
- Review of relevant literature which assesses asbestos exposure levels around similar plants and review of other identified sources of information relating risk of exposure to asbestos to distance from an asbestos plant;
- Preliminary community engagement and consultation with possible exposed community members;

**Phase 2** will involve:

- Examination current asbestos exposure for people living near the sites of the Wunderlich asbestos plant, Gaythorne and the James Hardie fibrolite plant, Newstead; and
- Compilation of recommendations on health protection or mitigation measures to manage ongoing risks from past practices to appropriate agencies and the community.