

Investigation findings

An investigation into asbestos-related health concerns has found that there is no evidence of elevated asbestos-related health risk to residents who have commenced living near the former factories sites in Gaythorne and Newstead since the mid-1980's, following the clean-up of the sites. However, it is noted in the past there was likely to have been asbestos exposure in the vicinity of the former factories while they were operational and prior to their clean-up.

Background

In October 2014, an investigation of asbestos-related health concerns, surrounding former asbestos factories at Gaythorne and Newstead, which both closed in the 1980s, was announced.

The Queensland Government convened a steering group to oversee the multi-agency investigation, aiming to determine whether there are any ongoing health risks to current residents of Gaythorne and Newstead. This steering group was led by the Department of Health and supported by;

- Department of Premier and Cabinet
- Queensland Treasury (Workplace Health and Safety Queensland)
- Department of Environment and Heritage Protection
- Department of Housing and Public Works
- Metro North Hospital and Health Service
- Brisbane City Council.

Scope

The scope of the investigation was to:

- examine current asbestos exposure of people living near the sites of the former Wunderlich asbestos factory, Gaythorne and the former James Hardie fibrolite factory, Newstead
- 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 factories by reviewing relevant literature which assesses asbestos exposure levels around similar factories and review of other identified sources of information relating risk of exposure to asbestos to distance from an asbestos factory
- establish as far as possible the epidemiology of asbestos-related disease near the Wunderlich asbestos factory, Gaythorne and the James Hardie fibrolite factory, 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.

Epidemiology

The epidemiological study found the number of mesothelioma cases in the vicinity of the former factory sites is consistent with what would be expected in the general Queensland population. Mesothelioma is the most commonly used marker for any effect of non-occupational exposure to asbestos fibres among the asbestos-related diseases.

While the epidemiological study did not identify an excess of cases of mesothelioma, the investigation acknowledges the anecdotal information that asbestos related disease has occurred in those who lived near the factory during its operation. The study was based on the residential address of the person at the time mesothelioma was diagnosed and was complicated by the difficulty in obtaining data over such a long period of time.

Asbestos monitoring

Monitoring was initially conducted at Gaythorne as the site histories of the former factory sites indicated that legacy asbestos contamination in Gaythorne was likely to be higher than that in Newstead (which had been extensively redeveloped). It was therefore decided that asbestos monitoring at Newstead would not be undertaken as the asbestos monitoring at Gaythorne indicated the airborne asbestos concentrations in Gaythorne were consistent with other areas of Brisbane.

Air, dust and/or bulk material samples were taken from 18 properties within 500 metres of the factory site (test houses), and from 12 properties greater than 3 kilometres away from any former factory site (control houses). One property consented to dust sampling, but not to air monitoring.

	Test houses - 18	Control houses - 12
Air monitoring (PCM)	Total fibre concentrations in all 51 samples at or below limit of detection.	Total fibre concentrations in 34 of 36 samples at or below 0.001 f/mL. No asbestos fibres in 2 samples above 0.001 f/mL.
Air monitoring (SEM)	No asbestos detected in 48 samples. Concentrations less than 0.001 f/mL in 3 samples.	No asbestos detected in 34 samples. Concentrations less than 0.001 f/mL in 2 samples.
Roof cavity dust (PLM)	12 out of 18 positive for asbestos.	4 out of 12 positive for asbestos.
Roof cavity dust (SEM)	12 out of 18 positive for asbestos.	2 out of 18 positive for asbestos.

The results of the monitoring program demonstrated the airborne asbestos fibre concentrations in proximity to the former asbestos factory site in Gaythorne are consistent with low asbestos fibre concentrations found in other areas of Brisbane.

What next?

The investigation highlighted some issues of broader significance, which has resulted in recommendations to address the need for:

- practical solutions to enable safe disposal of small quantities of asbestos waste by members of the public;
- appropriate management strategies for providing advice to residents in Gaythorne and in other Queensland communities where buried asbestos may be extensively present. Residents should be made aware that buried asbestos is not a risk unless it is disturbed
- continued community education and awareness strategies on safe handling of asbestos containing materials.

Key points to remember

All homes tested are safe and suitable to live in.

- Asbestos fibres are a health risk when respirable asbestos fibres become airborne and are breathed into the lungs.
- Avoid disturbing materials containing asbestos.
- If you must disturb asbestos materials, follow precautions to reduce the risk to a very low-level. This includes using a licensed asbestos removalist or wearing personal protective equipment, such as P2 face mask, gloves and protective clothing if you're handling asbestos material or entering a roof space.

Further information

Further information including the final report, fact sheets and FAQ pages can be found at www.health.qld.gov.au/asbestos

If you have any queries or concerns, please call 13 HEALTH (13 43 25 84).

If you have any concerns about your health, please contact your usual GP or health care provider.