

Woodsreef Mine Major Rehabilitation Project

Frequently Asked Questions

July 2018

What is asbestos?

Asbestos is the common name given to a group of six naturally-occurring silicate minerals. The six minerals belong to one of two classes:

- the Serpentine class
 - Chrysotile (white)
- the Amphibole class
 - Actinolite
 - Amosite (brown)
 - Anthophyllite
 - Crocidolite (blue)
 - Tremolite.

Asbestos fibres have high tensile strength and flexibility.

Chrysotile was the mineral mined at Woodsreef.

How can asbestos affect my health and what risks does it pose?

Asbestos fibres can pose a risk to health if airborne, as inhalation is the main way that asbestos enters the body. People who get health problems from inhaling asbestos have usually been exposed to high levels of asbestos over a long period of time. Breathing in asbestos fibres can cause asbestosis, lung

cancer and mesothelioma. The risk of contracting these diseases increases with the number of fibres inhaled. The symptoms do not usually appear until around 20 to 30 years after the first exposure to asbestos.

More generally, there are small quantities of asbestos fibres always present in the air. Most people are exposed to very small amounts of asbestos as they go about their daily lives and do not develop asbestos related health problems.

Does the legacy Woodsreef Mine pose a risk to public health?

A recent Health Risk Assessment on Woodsreef concludes the long-term public health risk is likely to be **negligible to low**, for adjacent communities. This risk increases with unauthorised access to the mine site.

To reduce the risk to users of the Barraba-Bundara Road, a number of mitigation measures are being implemented including sealing of the road verge, fencing and signage warning of asbestos.

A significant amount of asbestos bearing rock remains on site and can pose a risk if it is disturbed through unauthorised access.

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Have any ex-workers from the Woodsreef Mine been diagnosed with a dust disease?

Yes. The Dust Diseases Board records show seven cases of diagnosed dust disease, including mesothelioma and lung cancer, involving people who had worked at the Woodsreef Mine at some time during their working life. One worker had worked only at Woodsreef Mine.

What is the Woodsreef Taskforce?

The Woodsreef Taskforce is a multi-agency committee with representatives from NSW Department of Planning and Environment, Environmental Protection Agency, Ministry of Health, Department of Primary Industries, Hunter New England Health and WorkCover NSW. The Woodsreef Taskforce is a consultative group promoting input and advice from relevant members.

What has the Government done to mitigate the legacy of Woodsreef Mine?

The NSW Government allocated \$6.3 million for the Woodsreef Mine Major Rehabilitation Project to determine and mitigate any potential health, environmental and safety risks associated with the legacy mine.

To date the Woodsreef Mine Rehabilitation Project has:

- demolished the abandoned eight storey mill house, silos and administration building
- identified, managed and contained stockpiled hazardous asbestos product around the mine
- introduced an air monitoring program
- implemented a health risk assessment
- closed Mine Road, which runs through the mine site
- erected public warning signs on the perimeter of the mine site fence and on the side of the road adjacent to the mine site
- closed Travelling Stock Reserve and Camping reserve.

Where was the rubble from the demolition works buried?

The scope of the project included demolition of abandoned infrastructure and encapsulation of the waste material within an on-site containment cell. The Environmental Protection Agency indicated their support for the containment cell design used. This approach was successful.

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Has the Government investigated the risks of living in the local Woodsreef Community?

Yes. An air monitoring program and a Long-term Health Risk Assessment was conducted.

It concludes the long-term public health risk of asbestos exposure is likely to be negligible to low for adjacent communities and to members of the public that may have intermittent access areas adjacent to the mine.

It also recommends several controls be considered to minimise potential long-term asbestos exposure health risks including limiting public access to the site and minimising off-site migration of asbestos materials.

Did the Government conduct an environmental assessment before the project works commenced?

Yes. A Review of Environmental Factors (REF) was placed on public exhibition to allow for the community to provide feedback that was considered. It contains the specialist consultant's reports and assessments. The Commonwealth Department of the Environment approved the Project on the 4 July 2014. An approval condition was to publish an annual compliance report, this requirement was completed August 2017.

Why were the demolition works delayed?

A Flora and Fauna Assessment found that the threatened Large-eared Pied Bat was roosting in the abandoned mill building that was targeted for demolition works. As a result, additional survey studies had to be conducted which included the development of a species impact statement to accurately determine the likely impact of the demolition on the bat colony. Both Commonwealth and State Government environmental approval was required and as such the project demolition work was delayed for approximately six months.

What community consultation has taken place?

Prior to any works being undertaken, the Woodsreef Taskforce and NSW Department of Planning and Environment (the Department) conducted a public awareness campaign to provide information to the local community on the project proposal, asbestos in general and the legacy Woodsreef minesite.

In addition, a Woodsreef Community Advisor Group (WCAG) was established. It's role was to oversee, discuss and share information with the community on the demolition works and

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containment of the stockpiled asbestos. The WCAG was dissolved on completion of the works in June 2015.

Why were signs erected on the perimeter fencing and on the side of the public roads adjacent to the mine site?

Signs were erected along the site's perimeter as a key control to minimise exposure to the public. Signs warn of the danger of asbestos exposure when entering the site and to inform the public of the measures they can take to mitigate the risk of exposure when travelling along adjacent roads.

Why did the Government close Mine Road?

A thorough assessment was conducted by the Department (in consultation with the Woodsreef Taskforce) to determine the site condition and potential for public exposure to asbestos associated with the mine.

Closing the road was considered one of the most effective means of restricting public access to the mine and significantly reducing the risk of potential exposure to asbestos.

This is further supported by the NSW Ombudsman's Report "Responding to the asbestos problem: The need for significant reform in NSW" dated 17 November 2010,

which recommended closing Mine Road to public access.

Was the community able to comment on the closure of Mine Road?

Yes. A formal public consultation process was undertaken by the Department of Primary Industries and Crown Lands to assess the impact that the road closure would have on the local community. Whilst it was acknowledged that the road closure may inconvenience some residents the potential impacts were carefully weighed up and the decision to close the road was made by the Minister for Regional Infrastructure and Services. The decision was made in consultation with Tamworth Regional Council.

Will there be any future assessments, ongoing monitoring or activities at the site?

Yes, the Long-term Health Risk Assessment Report recommended further mitigation measures are undertaken to ensure access in and around the site is limited. These will be implemented by the end of 2018.

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More information

- Visit the Woodsreef Mine Rehabilitation Project webpage at: www.resourcesandgeoscience.nsw.gov.au/info/woodsreef.
- Call on 1300 305 695.
- If English isn't your first language, please call 131 450. Ask for an interpreter in your language and then request to be connected to our Information Centre on 1300 305 695.
- Email derelict.mines@planning.nsw.gov.au.

Other sources of useful information

Legacy Mines Program

www.resourcesandgeoscience.nsw.gov.au/info/legacymines.

Heads of Asbestos Coordination Authorities (HACA)

www.safework.nsw.gov.au/health-and-safety/safety-topics-a-z/asbestos/heads-of-asbestos-coordination-authorities-haca

Health

www.health.nsw.gov.au/environment/factsheets/Pages/asbestos-and-health-risks.aspx

Environmental Protection Agency

www.epa.nsw.gov.au

NSW Ombudsman

www.ombo.nsw.gov.au/news-and-publications/publications/reports/state-and-local-government/responding-to-the-asbestos-problem-the-need-for-significant-reform-in-nsw

SafeWork NSW

www.safework.nsw.gov.au