

Illawarra householders legacy asbestos removal project

COUNCIL NAME

Illawarra Shoalhaven
Joint Organisation

WEB ADDRESS

isjo.nsw.gov.au/

SIZE

5,800 square
kilometres

POPULATION

404,000

Overview

Following ongoing illegal dumping of asbestos the Illawarra Shoalhaven Joint Organisation (ISJO) developed a pilot project to provide a Free Asbestos Collection program for small quantities of asbestos from residential properties. Over the course of the program, recorded illegally dumped asbestos in the Illawarra declined by 55%. This case study showcases how this success pilot was developed and implemented for the community.

This project was designed to align with the participating Councils waste strategies, the NSW Environment Protection Authority Outcomes Framework, and the NSW Asbestos Waste Strategy. The project delivered a comprehensive asbestos community education program, supplemented by a free asbestos removal service for small amounts (under 10 square metres) of legacy asbestos.

Background

Over 12 months (July 2020 – June 2021), the Regional Illegal Dumping program in the Illawarra had recorded 75 incidents of small amounts of illegally dumped asbestos. Addressing the barriers leading to illegal dumping behaviour was a driver for this project, particularly in relation to disposal costs and simple lack of knowledge of how to lawfully dispose of the material.

An online survey of 84 respondents by ISJO found the following:

- 55% of respondents did not know if their local waste facility accepted asbestos;
- 100% knew that it was illegal to dispose of asbestos in your Council garbage bin;
- 30% had no idea if there was additional asbestos on their property or where it might be;
- 100% were not going to dispose of the asbestos without an assistance program and would have kept it on the property;
- 83% had an awareness of their legal implications if their asbestos waste was not lawfully disposed of;
- 71% were willing to use a mobile app to check whether a waste transporter lawfully disposed of their asbestos waste.

Householders had clearly highlighted that they were unprepared to handle and dispose of asbestos material and it was easier to leave it on their property rather than pursue an appropriate disposal mechanism. Social research undertaken by the EPA supports these findings.

Implementation

The implementation of this pilot project relied on the following key aspects:

- The ISJO being the central point of contact for information and bookings
- A prequalification survey completed by those who wanted to access the service either online or hardcopy which was posted to the resident
- Engaging a licenced contractor through an EOI process to undertake collections for the duration of the project

- Clear point of contact between ISJO and the contractor for changes, invoicing, chain of custody checks and balances between collection and lawful disposal
- Comprehensive communication and education program to promote conversation material “start the conversation about asbestos safe removal” as well as promoting the funding partner NSW EPA
- Monitoring and evaluation through data provided by the contractor as well as a closing survey of participants, completed by 84 residents who contacted ISJO over the program period
- Evaluation of RID online data to compare with baseline data.



Project Recognition in Local Newspaper



Legacy Asbestos at Residential Property

Outcomes

The project achieved the following:

- 5.8 tonnes of asbestos was safely collected from 83 households and lawfully disposed of at a cost of \$33,000 (data provided by the contractor);
- 55% decrease in asbestos dumping across the three LGAs (measured via RID online baseline July 2020 – June 2021);
- Successful pilot program for regional NSW in safe removal, lawful disposal and dissemination of clear and consistent education and communication materials;
- Cost benefit of illegally dumped asbestos cleanup averaging \$185 per kg vs proactive program costs averaging \$5 per kg;
- Met the triple bottom line outcomes of a reduction in social barriers, prevention of environmental degradation, and reduction in collection and disposal costs;
- Sharing of best practice through presentation at the 2022 NSW Waste Conference in Coffs Harbour.

Key Learnings

While Covid lockdowns were challenging and caused delays to the pilot project, as well as hindering face to face communication, by pivoting the engagement strategy to social media, the program was a overwhelming success and had to close new applications by week 9 of the project.

Beyond this point, many more residents enquired and were able to source information on the safe removal and lawful disposal of asbestos. However, ISJO did not anticipate the amount of resourcing the phone calls would take. Within the first two weeks of the campaign, there were more than 150 phones calls which credits the need for the project but is also very time intensive.

Householders targeted through the campaign were surveyed via a prequalification process to identify eligibility and to establish a baseline of existing awareness. The results highlighted limited awareness of how and where to appropriately dispose of asbestos and the anticipated costs of doing so. Without this service, householders highlighted that they were unprepared to handle and dispose of the material and it was easier to leave it on their property rather than pursue an appropriate disposal mechanism.

Participants also noted that when seeking information related to asbestos handling and disposal, they looked first to Council. However, there was a high level of uncertainty regarding whether or not Council accepted asbestos at waste facilities, with only 8% of participants confident.

This project was viewed by the NSW EPA as a successful pilot for regional NSW, addressing all six approaches framed in the NSW Asbestos Waste Strategy 2019-21. It also received overwhelmingly positive feedback from all participants.



Promoting Project at Shopping Centre

Contact

Name: Yvette Barrs
Position: Regional Programs Manager
Phone: 0407 431 746
Email: ybarrs@isjo.nsw.gov.au

This project was the 2022 winner of the Asbestos Management Award at the LGNSW Excellence in the Environment Awards.