

# Western Sydney Residential Asbestos Disposal Scheme (WSRADS)

**COUNCIL NAME**

Western Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils (WSROC)

Lead council:  
Blacktown City Council

**WEB ADDRESS**

[www.wsroc.com.au](http://www.wsroc.com.au)

**SIZE**

5,761 square kilometres

**POPULATION**

1,363,546  
(8 councils combined)

## Overview

The WSROC Western Sydney Regional Asbestos Disposal Scheme (WSRADS) included a series of programs run in partnership with the NSW Environment Protection Authority (EPA) to encourage the safe and legal disposal of non-friable (bonded) asbestos sheeting across western Sydney. The programs included:

1. Free removal of small amounts of non-friable asbestos (for example small amounts of roof sheeting) from residential homes by licensed asbestos removal contractors.
2. A council-issued rebate for residents correctly disposing of asbestos to landfill.

Both programs worked towards the key objective of reducing the illegal and unsafe disposal of asbestos in western Sydney by educating residents and making correct disposal easier and more affordable.

The Scheme was coordinated through a project control group which included WSROC and eight western Sydney councils: Blacktown (lead council), Fairfield, Hawkesbury, The Hills, Holroyd, Liverpool, Parramatta and Penrith.

The launch of the WSRADS promotional and educational campaign coincided with Asbestos Awareness Month (November) 2014 and the beginning of the renovation season.

This project was a NSW EPA Waste Less, Recycle More initiative funded from the waste levy.



**Image:** Fibro house similar to those found across western Sydney.  
Courtesy of: Asbestos Education Committee.

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## Background

The disposal of asbestos is a major ongoing issue facing western Sydney councils, with these Local Government Areas (LGAs) sometimes referred to as the heart of Sydney's 'fibro belt'. The use of asbestos-containing products in construction peaked between 1950 and 1980; just as western Sydney began its rapid expansion. It is believed that one in three homes contain asbestos and in some western Sydney suburbs, over 30 per cent of homes built at this time were constructed almost entirely from fibro-cement.

The prevalence of asbestos-containing products in western Sydney, combined with the public perception that asbestos disposal is expensive and time consuming has led to wide-scale illegal dumping across the region. Renewed interest in DIY renovation presents dangers for western Sydney residents who may not realise their home contains asbestos, or do not understand the risk asbestos fibres pose. For these reasons the councils aimed to provide residents with programs that reduced the cost of disposing asbestos and educated residents about how to safely deal with this product in a lawful manner. This program complements existing operations to combat illegal dumping through surveillance, deterrents and the prosecution of offenders.

## Implementation

### A tailored approach for a diverse region

A key feature of the western Sydney region is its demographic diversity. Some LGAs such as Blacktown, Fairfield, Holroyd and Liverpool have below average SEIFA<sup>1</sup> scores on the index of disadvantage, while The Hills is one of Sydney's most advantaged.

Western Sydney residents speak over 130 different languages. The region is home to significant culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities some of which require translated or culturally relevant materials. Auburn, Holroyd and Parramatta are the region's most culturally diverse LGAs with well over 50 per cent of the population born overseas.

To address the unique requirements of each LGA, asbestos promotion programs were managed by each participating council, with an overarching education component conducted by WSROC. The WSRADS programs ran between August 2014 to August 2015, however active promotion of the programs commenced in November 2014 to coincide with National Asbestos Awareness Month, an initiative of the Asbestos Education Committee. WSROC and participating councils utilised Asbestos Awareness Month campaign resources such as 'Betty the ADRI House'.

Participating councils ran advertisements, sponsored editorial, news stories and letter box drops to promote the WSRADS programs as well as including information on council websites. WSROC coordinated a number of media stories that ran across local newspapers during November providing safety advice and referring readers to the local programs on offer. This regional campaign was designed to target two primary groups within the region: 'legacy asbestos' and renovators. Often 'legacy asbestos' has been left unused but undisposed of for years because homeowners don't know how to dispose of it properly, or believe lawful disposal is too difficult or expensive. These residents were given safety messages and were referred to their council's free collection events which offered to collect small amounts of asbestos waste from eligible households.

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<sup>1</sup> Profile.id. SEIFA – disadvantage, WSROC Region. (2014). Available from: <http://profile.id.com.au/wsroc/seifa-disadvantage>

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Homeowners in the region seeking to take on DIY renovations in the near future have varying levels of knowledge regarding asbestos identification and safe disposal processes. Media in this category sought to help renovators identify areas of the home where asbestos may be present and reinforce the message that asbestos is not just a concern for fibro homes – it was also used in the construction of brick-veneer homes prior to the 1990s.

## Outcomes

During the campaign, WSROC and the eight participating councils reached over 1.9 million residents – equivalent to the entire population of Greater Western Sydney. In addition to paid advertisements and flyers promoting the WSRADS programs, 37 editorial stories ran across local and regional media sharing advice on asbestos identification and safe disposal practices.

At the completion of the Scheme in August 2015, it had achieved:

- A reach into the western Sydney community to over 1.9 million people.
- 506 households had participated in the WSRADS program to remove asbestos waste.
- 65 tonnes of asbestos waste was safely and lawfully disposed to landfill as a result of residents participating in the programs.
- Over \$12,000 worth of asbestos disposal rebates were issued to residents.

An unexpected outcome of this program was the way in which it encouraged residents to call councils' waste staff and discuss their concerns regarding asbestos more generally. This has helped councils to further understand some of the driving forces behind residents' behaviours in relation to asbestos disposal.

WSRADS was awarded a 'Betty Award' in early 2015 by the Asbestos Education Committee for the education and promotion of safe asbestos disposal in the community.

## Key Learnings

The uptake of the program indicated that cost and inconvenience were significant barriers to correct asbestos disposal for many residents. The collection events were highly sought after, with many participants indicating they did not know how to properly dispose of the asbestos waste before learning of this program. The ease of council-organised collection and disposal ensured residents were able to rid their properties of legacy asbestos waste. Cost of asbestos removal and disposal was the other key factor driving participation in the scheme. Many participants in the collection events indicated that the small volumes of legacy asbestos were inherited when purchasing or moving into the property. WSROC is looking to advocate for stricter regulations regarding the sale or lease of properties leaving behind accessible legacy asbestos waste. The eight councils in the program are considering how the most successful elements of the program could be integrated into ongoing council services in the future.

## Contact

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