



Victorian Principals Association

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VPA Position Paper

Asbestos Labelling

Purpose

The Victorian Principals Association is concerned that the recently introduced requirement for government schools to post asbestos warning notices in all areas where there is asbestos present, is excessive, inconsistently applied and having an prejudicial effect on the community's perception of individual schools.

Background to the VPA Position

The VPA position has been determined in the following context:

- The requirement for government schools to place asbestos warning notices in all areas of the school where asbestos is present.
- Only government schools are being required to post these notices, not Catholic and independent schools and not other government or public buildings such as libraries, post offices, kindergartens or child centres. This would appear unfair implementation.
- Asbestos is an emotive issue and signage stating that it is present can have a detrimental effect on staff and community perceptions of the safety and condition of government schools.
- Parents concerned by these notices may decide to enrol their children elsewhere.
- Schools that were built after the legislation banning the use of asbestos products was introduced in 1983 are still being required to put up asbestos warning signs.
- Concerns that schools in the first rollout of signage will bear the brunt of negative community reactions.

VPA Position

The VPA advocates for:

- The government to adopt a long term plan to fund the removal of all asbestos from its government schools. In the meantime the government should provide regular safety audits by qualified people.
- Clarification and reassessment of the requirement that presently only discriminates against government schools.
- Consistent application of asbestos audits and labelling across all sectors, not just government schools. Equally if there is to be signage it should be on all government buildings and all schools in Victoria.
- Clear communication by DEECD to the general public about what the signage means in order to reassure communities that there is no immediate danger and that this is a government requirement of its schools and not a responsibility or a decision at the individual school level.
- A more succinct labelling requirement, namely to place just one asbestos warning notice at the school's reception, rather than numerous notices around the buildings.
- New schools and school buildings constructed after the introduction of legislation, banning the use of asbestos products, to be exempt.