

The Mercury Mon Sept 24th 2007

Asbestos rife on Tassie school sites

PHILIPPA DUNCAN

SIX southern Tasmanian schools are riddled with asbestos, with at least 16 "significant instances" of the health hazard.

A list of schools with asbestos, obtained under Freedom of Information legislation, reveals Tasman District High has the most significant instances of asbestos in the state.

The rural school has 13 instances of asbestos in building interiors and another 10 on the site.

Kingston high and primary schools, Hobart College, Green Point Primary School at Bridgewater and Geeveston District High School have between 16 and 22 cases of asbestos.

But Education Department corporate services deputy secretary Greg Glass said parents could "rest assured" that the asbestos posed no danger to students or staff.

"Providing the material is in a sound condition and sealed, it is not regarded as a problem and does not require removal," he said.

"The department is not aware of any unsecured, unsafe asbestos in any school building in Tasmania.

"The Department of Education has taken, and will continue to take, all necessary steps to identify asbestos in Tasmanian government schools."

TOP 10

Tasmanian schools with most cases of asbestos and number of cases.

Tasman District High	23
Green Point Primary	22
Kingston Primary	20
Geeveston District High ..	18
Kingston High	16
Hobart College	16
Mersey Heights Special ..	10
Prospect High	9
Molesworth Primary	9
Waimea Heights Primary ..	8

The inhalation of asbestos fibres can cause a number of serious illnesses, including mesothelioma and cancer.

Mr Glass said asbestos was common in many buildings in Tasmania constructed before 1964 and existed in the floor tiles and wall linings of some buildings.

"The presence of asbestos is something that is dealt with when schools are upgraded through capital works programs," he said.

"Registers are required to be kept at sites where asbestos is present and these include information which details the location and

condition of the asbestos."

But information about the location and condition of asbestos in individual schools was not disclosed to the *Mercury*.

There was an asbestos scare in August when chunks of asbestos were found lying on grass less than 250m from a childcare centre at New Norfolk.

Thieves had been ripping up pipe casing from concrete trenches to steal copper pipes from the site, tearing asbestos lagging in the process near the kindergarten in the grounds of the disused Royal Derwent Hospital.

Parents were told children were not at risk because the asbestos posed no threat unless it was disturbed.

The Derwent Valley Council general manager had not read the environmental assessment of the site commissioned by the State Government in 1996 which stated: "Asbestos-lagged buried pipelines should be removed."

IPM occupational hygienist Caroline Langley said there was "a lot of asbestos around".

"Just because it's there does not mean it's dangerous," she said.

"Some of the concern is not consistent with the risk.

"The fibres don't spontaneously jump out of a sheet."