

## Senate Standing Committee on Education and Employment

### QUESTIONS ON NOTICE Budget Estimates 2014-2015

**Agency - Comcare**

**Department of Employment Question No. EM0785\_15**

**Senator McKenzie provided in writing.**

**Question**

**Comcare - Asbestos monitoring**

• Please provide a detailed update on the Asbestos monitoring activities undertaken by Comcare.

**Answer**

- In August 2013, Comcare initiated a verification program of remediation of telecommunication pits containing asbestos. The aim of the verification program is to assess the work of all contractors employed to remediate pits.
- To 2 May 2014, **847** site verification inspections had been conducted and **111** contractors assessed by Comcare inspectors overseeing asbestos remediation work:
  - a) No substantial breaches of law have been identified.
  - b) Significant improvements have been noted in the health and safety standards of work performed.
  - c) All companies remain cooperative in introducing improved systems.
  - d) Telstra and NBN contractors are consistently achieving high levels of health and safety standards in their workplaces. Where identified, improvements in the health and safety standards of work are enacted swiftly.
- Contractors are assessed against the standards set by Telstra which are over and above the requirements of the *Work, Health and Safety Act 2011* (WHS Act). While minor non compliances of the WHS Act have been identified at times, all have been rectified and no further regulatory enforcement action was warranted.
- The improved standards in asbestos work have driven a high standard of self-regulation across the industry. Comcare will continue to monitor this type of work, confirming that the high standards are being met.
- The following table outlines the number of proactive site inspections conducted to date. Inspections involve announced and unannounced site visits.

	Proactive site verification inspections completed
August to December 2013	361
January to March 2014	383
April to 2 May	103
<b>Total</b>	<b>847</b>

- As at 2 May Comcare had assessed and verified the work of **111** contractors involved in pit remediation work for the NBN roll out.
  - a) Six new contractors have commenced pit remediation work in 2014.
  - b) Four contracting companies have been terminated by Telstra as they have not maintained the standards set by Telstra.
  - c) 17 companies have not yet undertaken the Telstra workplace assessment process and in the long term may or may not progress to undertake asbestos pit remediation work.
  - d) A number of contractors have had limited verification inspections due to the NBN roll out not progressing as quickly as expected which restricts Comcare's ability to fully assess them.
- Comcare had a budget of \$1.4 million dollars for this inspection work for the 2013-14 financial year. As at 30 April 2014, Comcare had spent \$1,021,627.
- Three additional inspectors were contracted as verification officers from 7 April 2014 to end of June 2014. This increased the dedicated inspector numbers to nine (plus an additional coordination officer). This increase is to enable greater attendance at site verification inspections for the remainder of this financial year.

NPP funding has been approved for the 2014-15 financial year.