

QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

ADDITIONAL ESTIMATES HEARING : 23 February 2015

IMMIGRATION AND BORDER PROTECTION PORTFOLIO

(AE15/044) - Asbestos in vehicles from China - Programme 1.1 Border Management (ACBPS)

Senator Carr, Kim (L&CA 77) asked:

Senator KIM CARR: Yes, they have been keen to get on. Have you seen the report in The Australian this morning concerning claims that Chinese imports of asbestos have increased, that there is mounting evidence of its use in automotive, mining and building materials and that it is going undetected by the Customs service?

Senator KIM CARR: Do you have any sense of how widespread this issue is?

Mr Quaedvlieg: I would have to take that on notice in terms of statistical figures for interceptions. What I can say to you in a generic sense is that it is not increasing. It is relatively stable. Notwithstanding that, we are constantly vigilant. We take this matter very seriously. As I indicated, we have good leads in terms of the countries and the industries of highest risk, and that is where we dedicate our resources.

Senator KIM CARR: The claims made in the newspaper The Australian today suggest that we do not know how big the problem is. It is not quoting a Customs official, it is quoting an observer. Do you disagree with that proposition?

Mr Quaedvlieg: I think I will take on notice the question of a statistical size of the problem, but can I say this: I think the notion that we would be able to physically inspect each and every one of two million sea containers that come through the border per annum is a nonsense. That is not going to occur. We have though, in the sea cargo container environment, a very mature and very extensive intelligence profiling capability. That capability, as I have indicated, is directed at countries and industries of highest risk. The same methodology applies to the interception of drugs and/or firearms. I am confident, having looked at the problem now for some time, that it is not a phenomenon that is growing.

Answer:

The Australian Customs and Border Protection Service undertakes a combination of monitoring, assurance and enforcement activities to manage the risk of asbestos importation.

While it is not possible to provide exact numbers on the amounts of automotive, mining and building material imported from China that are at risk of containing asbestos, based on a comparison of interventions between financial year 2013-14 and 2014-15, there is no evidence to suggest China's imports of asbestos has increased.