

Senate Standing Committee on Education Employment and Workplace Relations

**QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Budget Estimates 2011-2012**

Agency - Safe Work Australia

DEEWR Question No.EW0302_12

Senator Abetz asked on 30/05/2011, Hansard page 104.

Question

Asbestos and Telecommunications Duct – SWA Draft Regulations

Senator ABETZ: Let us wait and see what the final version is. If I may briefly ask—and you can take this on notice, because I assume you will not have an answer—whether the draft regulations will make any asbestos issues with pulling cables through existing telecommunication ducts safer or less safe, easier or more difficult, more or less expensive for the NBN project? I assume you would not have an answer. Mr Hoy: I will take that on notice.

Answer

Safe Work Australia has provided the following response:

Currently employers in all jurisdictions have an obligation under existing work health and safety laws to ensure that exposure of workers and other persons to airborne asbestos is eliminated or minimised so far as reasonably practicable and that exposure to airborne asbestos at a workplace never exceeds the asbestos exposure standard. Employers must put appropriate controls in place to eliminate or minimise so far as reasonably practicable exposure to airborne asbestos and where there is a possibility of exposure to airborne asbestos levels above the asbestos exposure standard. Each jurisdiction currently adopts the national exposure standard for asbestos.

These current legislative requirements are reflected in the draft model Work Health and Safety (WHS) Regulations to require a person conducting a business or undertaking at a workplace to ensure, so far as reasonably practicable, that exposure to airborne asbestos is eliminated or, if that is not reasonably practicable, minimised so far as is reasonably practicable while always ensuring that the asbestos exposure standard is not exceeded at the workplace.

On this basis, work practices that comply with current legislative requirements to prevent exposure to asbestos during the process of pulling cables through existing asbestos cement telecommunication ducts should not need to be changed to comply with the model WHS Regulations when they are introduced. Compliance with the model WHS Regulations in relation to this activity is expected to provide for the same level of safety and similar levels of ease and cost of compliance as current legislative requirements.