

QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

BUDGET ESTIMATES HEARING: 22 May 2006

IMMIGRATION AND MULTICULTURAL AFFAIRS PORTFOLIO

(236) Output 1.3: Enforcement of Immigration Law

Senator Nettle asked:

Villawood relocation

1. How long has DIMA known about Asbestos contamination?
2. What was done, who was contacted about it?
3. How much did the relocation of detainees cost – breakdown of costs?
4. Have current and former detainees and/or staff been screened for asbestos related diseases? If not, why not?

Answer:

1. Since 2002, when mitigation measures were implemented as part of an ongoing management plan for the site.
2. Since 2002, the area known to contain below surface asbestos containing material has been fenced off and not in use, except for maintenance purposes such as grass slashing, and was not considered to pose a risk. As part of the planning process for the potential Easter 2006 protest at Villawood, the NSW Police sought assurance that if protesters entered the fenced off area that it was also safe for NSW Police to do so. Following the receipt of preliminary results of testing undertaken in response to the NSW Police request, further testing was commissioned and independent expert advice was sought.

Following the discovery of potentially asbestos containing material on the surface of the fenced off area, a number of individuals and organisations were contacted at the time including:

- The Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs staff at Villawood and Canberra;
- The Department of Health and Ageing;
- The Department of Finance and Administration;
- Comcare;
- The Commonwealth Ombudsman;
- The NSW Police;
- GSL (Australia) Pty Ltd; and
- Villawood Immigration Detention Centre detainees.

Independent advice and services were received from HLA Envirosciences Pty Ltd (an EPA Accredited site auditor), Environmental Safety Professionals, (an NATA accredited sampling and testing company) and Australasian Technical Services Pty Ltd (a registered asbestos removal company). Based on professional advice from these companies a mitigation strategy was developed and implemented that resulted in the entire site being cleared of visible surface fragments of potentially asbestos containing material and identified contaminated

areas being covered with 100mm of compacted gravel and fencing and appropriate signage being erected. This work was completed on 13 April 2006.

Air quality monitoring was in place during the mitigation work and over the Easter period and continues, as at the end of August 2006, in some areas of the site. To date, all results have been below maximum acceptable levels.

3. The total cost for the relocation of detainees and the mitigation work is some \$2.4m. The breakdown of these costs into the major items includes:

Air Charters	\$329,000
Security (NSW Police and commercial contractors)	\$347,000
Escorts/Guarding (GSL)	\$383,000
Health	\$ 8,000
Catering	\$ 58,000
Consultants/Advisers	\$125,000
Equipment Hire (buses, transportable buildings etc)	\$234,000
Site mitigation work	\$836,000
Repairs and Maintenance	\$ 17,000
DIMA staff costs	\$ 48,000
Miscellaneous	\$ 15,000
TOTAL	\$2,400,000

4. No. DIMA has followed the recommendations of independent Environmental Health Specialists who work within the guidelines issued by the Department of Health and Ageing for the *Management of Asbestos in the Non-Occupational Environment (2005)*. These guidelines state that health testing is not recommended for non-occupational exposure to asbestos (pages 39-40).