

**Embargoed until 11am Wednesday 17 November 2010**

## NSW Ombudsman **Special Report to Parliament**

### **The asbestos problem**

The Ombudsman Bruce Barbour tabled a special report to Parliament today entitled *Responding to the asbestos problem: the need for significant reform*.

Exposure to asbestos can be deadly. This report details the Ombudsman's concerns about public safety and the way asbestos is dealt with in NSW.

Asbestos is a community wide problem and it is not restricted to the workplace. Asbestos is in houses, schools, hospitals, factories and commercial buildings. It is not possible to identify how many buildings in NSW contain asbestos. Current scientific literature indicates there is no safe exposure level for asbestos fibres.

**'Education and information about the risks of asbestos and greater public awareness about preventing and controlling exposure is essential'** said the Ombudsman. **'The community places its trust in government to help keep it safe'**.

**'The current approach to dealing with asbestos in NSW is disjointed, ad hoc and confusing'** said Mr Barbour. **'There is no single government agency responsible for coordinating the management and containment of asbestos, there is no state-wide plan for dealing with asbestos, there are gaps in asbestos legislation and funding to deal with these issues is inadequate.'**

The Ombudsman has recommended:

- An Asbestos Coordination Authority (ACA) be established and adequately funded
- A comprehensive public awareness program for all sections of the community
- An Asbestos Act be introduced to facilitate effective measures to appropriately address asbestos issues in NSW
- The NSW government develop a state-wide plan for dealing with asbestos
- Adequate funding be allocated for implementing the state-wide asbestos plan

**'There must be action on asbestos in NSW that tackles these challenging issues'** Mr Barbour said. **'Preventing exposures to asbestos through the implementation of a comprehensive government plan has the potential to save many lives and must be a priority.'**