



Speech by

Jann Stuckey

MEMBER FOR CURRUMBIN

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ASBESTOS IN SCHOOLS

Mrs STUCKEY (Currumbin—LNP) (12.39 pm): In June last year I informed the House of mistakes made by the Minister for Public Works's department regarding asbestos removal at Caningeraba State School. Despite initial denials that these were mere allegations and the minister's verbal abuse of a concerned parent, the minister finally admitted that there were errors that 'warranted my close attention'. This close attention resulted in an internal QBuild investigation and an external investigation by Workplace Health and Safety Queensland. The damning report found that QBuild had failed to comply with its own policies and procedures regarding asbestos handling. Failures included documents requiring updating, inconsistencies with legislative requirements, terms of notification, access to the school's asbestos register, access permits generally and work method statements.

Finally revealing these findings to the House some three months after the incident, the minister not only claimed that QBuild would implement all recommendations from the said report but insisted that 'this must never happen again'. The minister cannot claim that this was a one-off incident. Such behaviour has happened before and has happened again—this time at Mackay West State School in December 2009. Once again this minister has shown that the only thing he takes seriously is avoiding responsibility. He ignores reports that he himself ordered. The minister claims that QBuild employs a suitably qualified contractor in all instances where such a licence is required. Evidence from Mackay West State School shows that this has not happened. It is alleged that QBuild went to Programmed Maintenance Services, who were contracted to clean this site, and directed them to backdate a workplace statement to December 2009 stating that workers were trained in asbestos handling when they were not. I table photos of workers cleaning up the site.

Tabled paper: Photographs of asbestos removal [\[1843\]](#).

One of them, Mr Farnham, has been sacked for speaking out. Like a broken record we heard how seriously the minister takes asbestos, how much it has personally affected him. Yet, despite these protests of feigned outrage, despite these reports which point out where training and procedures are inadequate, despite his word that 'this must never happen again', it has. The Bligh government's attitude of silencing decent accredited workers and telling others to turn a blind eye is why so many people label the way the government handles asbestos removals as 'dangerous cowboy operations'.

A recent accusation that QBuild representative Bill Paton has destroyed a Mackay asbestos removalist's business and along with it 28 jobs since the December incident deserves close attention. The aggrieved contractor, Jayson Maskell-Drew of Asbestos Removal Technology, believes Mr Paton should be called to account for his actions and claims that Mr Paton took it upon himself to inform the contractor's client Townsend Building Services Mackay that he will preclude them from tendering on any jobs if they intend to use him or his company as the asbestos removalist. I note that my colleague the member for Moggill has seen fit to write to the CMC, asking it to investigate official misconduct, and I fully support this move.

If this is how QBuild and the Queensland government treat companies which comply with the code and do not take short cuts, then it gives you a pretty good idea of how lightly they take asbestos removal

and mock their own code of practice. Now the minister has been forced to order another investigation—this time supposedly an independent one, with firm Ashdown Integrity Services, but he has enrolled staff from Project Services to provide technical support. Where is the independence in that? Queenslanders could be forgiven for thinking we have our own Peter Garrett here in the form of the Minister for Public Works. The issue that is of greatest concern is ensuring that all government employees whose jobs give them a reasonable prospect of encountering hazardous substances such as asbestos are given the proper training to prepare them to deal with this substance.

QBuild had 944 field staff as at 4 August 2009. Of those 944 staff, not one of them holds an A-class asbestos removal licence. Furthermore, only 66 per cent of QBuild staff have completed asbestos specific training and hold a B-class asbestos removal licence. Why has the minister not ensured that all QBuild field staff have received this training? The evidence is clear that the current training system is not working to protect QBuild employees or the general public. How many people have been contaminated by this government's sloppiness?

In government, the LNP will not simply pay lip-service to the safe removal of asbestos. We will ensure that there is adequate training for QBuild staff who handle it. Breaching of procedures will not be tolerated or swept under the carpet so to speak. Companies without appropriate training, such as Programmed Maintenance Services, will not be employed to handle asbestos without trained employees. Independent audits will be just that, not the same company conducting both, as happens now. And we will implement a regulatory body with teeth. Allegations that companies have committed serious breaches and bringing in workers from interstate to work in our schools is a slap in the face for Queenslanders and exposes the Bligh government's jobs, jobs, jobs mantra as a complete farce.

(Time expired)