

27 November 2013

Illegal asbestos imports putting Australians at risk

Tougher policing of imports described as asbestos free is urgently needed by the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service, the ACTU said today.

As shown on last night's 730 Report, and the subject of Union concerns over a long period, the inadequacy of importation controls, especially those applying to China are allowing products such as locomotives and motor vehicles containing white asbestos to be imported into Australia.

"Asbestos causes cancer, it's that simple," ACTU Assistant Secretary Michael Borowick said.

"Australia has a decade old ban on the importation of asbestos to protect the community from its harmful effects that isn't being enforced.

"Importers have been duty bound since December 2003 to not import anything containing asbestos yet it is still happening and to make matters worse, the regulator isn't doing its job and enforcing the ban.

"It is well established that imports from China, particularly freight trains and motor vehicles contain asbestos components.

"Tragically, asbestos has been discovered only after workers had been exposed during an engine repair.

"Last year, despite around 25,000 motor vehicles found to contain asbestos being imported from China by Ateco no prosecution by the regulator took place.

"These are complete failures by the regulator who should have identified the asbestos before the vehicles and trains were allowed into Australia.

"There are a growing number of unacceptable breaches of the asbestos ban occurring under the watch of the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service, and something needs to be done.

"If nothing is done, more workers and members of the community will needlessly be put at risk.

"The Government must urgently provide greater resources to the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service to ensure they are equipped to enforce the ban.'

This week is National Asbestos Awareness Week.

Media contact:

Carla De Campo, 0410 579 575

Eleni Hale, 0418 793 885