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## Workers' Memorial Day 2012: Strong action required to end deaths from asbestos exposure, say unions

Ahead of Workers Memorial Day 2012, unions are calling for a National Asbestos Authority to manage the mandatory removal of the deadly chemical from all Australian buildings by 2030.

ACTU President Ged Kearney said Workers' Memorial Day tomorrow was a poignant reminder that Australia has the world's highest per capita rate of asbestos-related deaths, with up to 18,000 more Australians expected to have died from mesothelioma by 2020.

"This is an abysmal reality that we must change. That is why unions want Australia's built environment to be asbestos-free by 2030 and we are calling for a stand-alone National Asbestos Authority to make it happen," she said.

Ms Kearney said to achieve an asbestos-free Australia, there must be a national audit of all asbestos containing material, starting with government buildings and dump sites.

"The Government must initiate a prioritised removal program, to be carried out only by licensed removalists," she said.

Ms Kearney said unions also reiterated their call for a home audit scheme, which would require home owners to have their houses checked by a registered practitioner prior to selling or leasing out their property. There was also a need for a co-ordinated education and awareness campaign so that home owners and home renovators are aware of not only the dangers of asbestos contamination, but of how to have it safely removed.

Ms Kearney said it was also important for workers, through their unions, to have a direct say in making their workplace safe and healthy.

"That is why Australian unions have launched a new Speak Up for Health and Safety awareness campaign and website.

"There is no more important role for unions than ensuring people work in a safe and healthy environment. The new campaign will help raise awareness among OHS representatives within workplaces and workers generally, empowering them to take action and stand up for their rights."

In Australia, the workplace related death toll is estimated to be more than 4.7 times higher than the Australian road toll. In 2008 there were 1464 road deaths, while Government statistics show there are up to 7000 work related deaths each year.

"Workers' Memorial Day is a day where unions across the globe take time to remember those killed because of work and re-double our efforts to make every workplace safer and healthier," Ms Kearney said. "But it is also a time to reflect on current OHS laws and practices and how they can be improved in order to prevent future deaths at work."

For more information go to [www.safeatwork.org.au](http://www.safeatwork.org.au)

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