

MEDIA RELEASE

20 June 2025

ILLEGAL ASBESTOS DUMPING HURTING OUR COMMUNITY

Illegal dumping of construction and demolition (C&D) waste containing asbestos by a number of residents and tradesmen has created critical challenges for Council in ensuring the safety of their staff and the wider community, while also managing this area of waste.

Currently the waste management team is relocating C&D waste that potentially contains asbestos to a lower risk area for future processing. This provides a level of containment to prevent further exposure or environmental contamination. From Monday 23 June, a staff member will be stationed at the bulky waste area to assist the community in determining the right waste stream for their rubbish.

Asbestos-handling requires strict protocols to protect workers and members of the community due to its hazardous nature, with correct PPE, trained personnel and containment methods the minimum requirements for keeping people safe. People who illegally dump asbestos-contaminated material at NIRC's waste management centre not only create health risks for themselves, but for friends and family who could be unknowingly exposed to the material.

Exporting asbestos waste off-island is costly for residents, due to transport and mandatory NATA (National Association of Testing Authorities) testing to ensure safety standards are complied with. During February and March 2021, Council exported approximately 260 tonnes of bonded asbestos off-island. Since that time, changes in Australian legislation have caused additional costs in testing, while freight costs have also risen.

One alternative to export could be the development of an engineered disposal pit on Norfolk Island specifically for asbestos waste, which could reduce transport costs but would require careful design to meet planning and environmental legislation. This option would need to consider the initial cost to develop and construct the pit and also look at the implications of monitoring the pit in the long term.

As a first step, NIRC has prioritised the completion of a new DRAFT Waste Strategy, with clear timelines and stakeholder input, and will conduct a feasibility study for the construction and management of an on-island disposal pit, assessing environmental impact, regulatory requirements, and long-term costs versus exporting.

In the meantime, Council will be developing a community awareness campaign aimed at curbing illegal and dangerous dumping of asbestos, potentially including penalties or incentives around compliance. The current interim measures of maintaining secure storage during relocation will minimise risks until a permanent solution is implemented.

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