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Significant gaps in WorkSafe's regulation of asbestos removal

The Auditor General today tabled in Parliament *Regulation of Asbestos Removal* that assessed if WorkSafe effectively regulates asbestos removal by issuing and renewing licences appropriately and performing risk-based monitoring to reduce the risk of asbestos exposure.

Auditor General Ms Caroline Spencer said although asbestos is a challenging area to regulate, given the significant risks to worker and community health we expected WorkSafe to have established good practices for regulating asbestos removal. This was not what we found and there are several important areas where practices need to improve.

'WorkSafe's regulatory actions are not risk-based, documentation is weak, and there is a lack of rigour and transparency in licensing approval controls,' Ms Spencer said.

While WorkSafe performs regular office-based audits of licensees' records and undertakes worksite inspections and investigations of some licensees, there are significant deficiencies in their overall monitoring and compliance activities.

In particular, audits are not comprehensive, not consistently undertaken or documented and do not routinely or regularly include worksite inspections when asbestos is removed.

Ms Spencer said WorkSafe could not demonstrate that it targets its inspection resources at the highest risk employers or worksites.

'WorkSafe is also missing important opportunities to use asbestos-related data from the community and other government entities, including a large volume of complaints received, to better target its compliance and awareness raising activities,' Ms Spencer said.

The report includes recommendations to strengthen WorkSafe's regulation of asbestos removal.

The Auditor General is pleased the new WorkSafe Commissioner has accepted the findings and has committed to building organisational and staff capability to better manage worker health measures.

'Many State and local government entities license or register businesses across a range of industries and they can consider application of the recommendations in this report where relevant to their own diverse regulatory regimes,' Ms Spencer said.

Report resources

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