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media release

NEW SOUTH WALES ABORIGINAL LAND COUNCIL

Immediate action needed to clean up Asbestos contaminated Aboriginal Community

29 April 2009

The NSW Aboriginal Land Council has urged all key stakeholders to expedite their investigations and actions to address asbestos contamination within the South Coast Aboriginal community of Wallaga Lakes.

“It is clearly a health issue of considerable concern which needs immediate action,” said NSWALC’s Chairperson, Bev Manton.

Ms Manton said that reports of dangerously-high levels of asbestos found scattered around the community on front lawns, underneath a community building and in the local tip is unacceptable.

“I urge all parties, State or Federal, local or community-based to work together to find an urgent solution.”

“There’s talk about closing the gap and here’s a perfect example for Governments to take some immediate action and save lives,” she said.

Ms Manton said that representatives from the State Department of Environment and Climate Change (DECC) and the NSW Department of Health visited the community yesterday.

“I understand that they’ve taken samples of the asbestos for further analysis and will also look at having an environmental hygienist at the community early next week to conduct comprehensive assessment.”

Ms Manton said that NSWALC raised the issue of asbestos contamination in Wallaga Lakes as a matter of urgency with the NSW’s Minister for Aboriginal Affairs Paul Lynch during a Council meeting in Sydney late yesterday.

“To see and hear of people – especially children - living in this level of contamination on a daily basis is disturbing,” she told Minister Lynch.

NSWALC’s Councillor for the South Coast Region, Jack Hampton, said that he has visited the community last week and met with the Merrimans Local Aboriginal Land Council to assess first hand the extent of the contamination.

“I am shocked by the levels of contamination which has some experts indicating that it’s the most serious situation they’ve ever seen in any community.”

Cr Hampton said that the asbestos pits scattered across the community could have been the result of the way the houses were demolished and rebuilt in the 1990s.

“Clearly, it is long overdue for resolution.” he concluded.

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