



## Media Release

For Immediate Release

### Flood cleanups pose risk of cancer

As the east coast of Australia mops up the impacts of heavy rain and flooding, Cancer Council warns of the increased risk of cancer caused by asbestos when cleaning up flood damage in businesses and homes.

Malignant mesothelioma, a cancer of the tissue lining the cavities of the torso that usually affects the lungs or abdomen and is nearly always due to exposure to asbestos, caused [696 deaths in Australia](#) in 2020.

“Most Australians diagnosed with malignant mesothelioma in Australia in recent years have a history working with asbestos as a trades person, or in the land or water transport industries.”

People undertaking home renovation or home maintenance are also at risk of being exposed to asbestos. Cancer Council warns the risks for everyday Australians may increase while cleaning and clearing flood-damaged properties.

Chair of Cancer Council’s Occupational and Environmental Cancers Committee, Professor Tim Driscoll, focuses his studies in epidemiology on work-related exposures and diseases at The University of Sydney and has spoken out about the dangers of asbestos for many years.

“Mesothelioma has a long latency period, which means symptoms typically appear decades after a person has been exposed to asbestos. Due to this we have seen a steady increase in the number of mesothelioma cases since 1982 and sadly, survival rates remain low,” Professor Driscoll said.

“As more people are impacted by severe weather conditions and required to repair their homes and businesses due to damages, it's important they are aware of dangers associated with asbestos.”

New research out of Cancer Council Queensland aims to understand the geographic distribution of malignant mesothelioma incidence and survival across Australia to identify varying demand in diagnostic and treatment services.

The study found strong evidence of geographical variation in cases of mesothelioma in Australia, with high incidence in Western Australia and coastal areas of Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria. Across all areas, poor survival rates were consistent.

“This research clearly demonstrates there is widespread demand for diagnostic and treatment services relating to mesothelioma in Australia,” said Chief Executive of Cancer Council Australia Professor Tanya Buchanan.

“Prevention is the most effective way to reduce future incidence of mesothelioma.”



“We urge Australians facing the clean-up of flood-damaged homes, particularly for properties built before 2003, to explore professional support in identifying and removing asbestos,” Professor Buchanan noted.

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**For media enquiries please contact:**

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See Cancer Council’s [website](#), [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).

**About the research:**

*Geographic distribution of malignant mesothelioma incidence and survival in Australia* is available [here](#).