



Minutes

Meeting:	Newcastle Community Consultative Committee on the Environment (out of session)	Date:	Monday 7 March 2022
Location:	Online	Time:	4.00pm – 5.00pm
Last Meeting:	Monday 21 February 2022	Next Meeting:	Monday 16 May 2021
Present:	John Tate – Chairperson Rick Banyard – Community representative Christopher Tola – Community representative Keith Craig – Community representative Nathan Robinson – Industry representative Leah Cook – Industry representative Trudie Larnach – Industry representative David Clarke – Council representative Steven Crick – Environmental representative Gina Bradley – EPA David Gathercole – EPA		
Apologies:	Claire Miles – EPA Stephen White – DPIE		

Agenda items:

1. Introduction

1.1. Acknowledgment of Country

The Chair acknowledged the Awabakal and Worimi people as the traditional owners of the land and paid respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.

1.2. Housekeeping for online meeting

Ms Bradley outlined procedures for participating in the meeting online.

1.3. Present and apologies

The Chair welcomed the committee and noted the apologies.

2. Previous Minutes and Outstanding Actions – carry over to next quarterly meeting

3. Wool Store Fire, Annie St, Wickham

3.1. Incident update and group discussion

The Chair noted the questions and key issues prepared in writing by the community representatives ahead of the meeting. The questions and key issues are attached to the meeting minutes at **Tab 1**. Mr Gathercole thanked the committee for their comprehensive preparation and confirmed that the document at **Tab 1** has been provided to the incident coordination team. It will be used to collate questions for a factsheet to inform the broader community.

The Chair acknowledged that it would be difficult to work through all 36 questions within the hour allocated for the meeting. Mr Gathercole offered to start by providing a general update and information that might address a lot of the questions. The remaining time was used to ask further questions as referenced below from **Tab 1**. Information and answers to questions were provided by Mr Gathercole on behalf of the EPA and Mr Clarke on behalf of council. The discussion is summarised as follows:

Incident overview

- On Tuesday 1 March 2022 there was a large fire at the Wool Store storage facility on Annie Street, Wickham. The facility is an 80-year-old building that contained asbestos contaminated material.
- The committee commended FRNSW for their efforts to control the fire and prevent further spread. The fuel terminal also provided instrumental advice to FRNSW to prevent catastrophic damage.
- A public meeting took place on Wednesday 2 March 2022. The Local Emergency Operations Centre was activated on Thursday 3 March 2022.
- In response to qu. 35: Additional resources have been provided over the weekend and good progress has been made following a process of assessment to ensure residents can return as soon as possible.
- In response to qu. 5: Public areas such as Islington Park were closed by council on Saturday 5 March 2022 due to the proximity of the fire and presence of asbestos. Fencing was erected to restrict access. It was not possible to fence the full parameter of the park. Council is managing access and replacing signage and tape when necessary.
- In response to qu. 28: The EPA arranged specialist air monitoring equipment to monitor air particles in the vicinity of Wickham. There have been zero detects so far. This is partly due to the heavy rains. The committee were interested to know how many monitors there are and where they are located. Mr Clarke agreed to raise this request at the Local Emergency Management Committee (LEMC) meeting tomorrow.

Multi agency approach

- In response to qu. 16: The NSW Police are the incident coordinator. This means that the NSW Police are leading the response to this incident. Wayne Humphries is the lead contact.
- The EPA has been working closely with council to provide support to the NSW Police in their response.
- In response to qu. 18 and 19: The EPA and Public Works have engaged licence accredited asbestos specialists, to assess the ash and fall out from the fire. It will be for the asbestos specialists to assess the specific variants of asbestos found in the building.
- FRNSW have used data from the Bureau of Meteorology to map the extend of the contamination.
- The EPA and council are providing support to NSW Police, along with HAZMAT, FRNSW, Public Work and Safe Work.
- In response to qu. 21: FRNSW and NSW Police are the lead agencies for the demolition of the remaining building. The EPA will provide recommendations to reduce dust. Safety will be paramount.
- NSW Health are also involved in the emergency response and will be providing input into the Q&A/factsheet regarding potential health impacts.

Asbestos assessment process

- In response to qu. 2: The priority has been to assess the homes of the 200+ residents that were evacuated by the NSW Police. Residents who had left their windows open are considered high priority. Childcare centres, schools, roads and public areas such as Islington Park are also considered high priority.
- In response to qu. 3: The community has been urged to report any ash and suspected contamination to the EPA Environment Line in order to coordinate asbestos assessments.

- In response to qu. 3: The EPA Environment Line were briefed on the incident in order to respond to callers. There was some inappropriate behaviour from one of the initial callers, who was abusive towards EPA staff. This behaviour is not condoned.
- In response to qu. 3: Over 200 properties have been registered with the EPA. All reports have been followed up by email/phone to notify them that their details have been provided to the asbestos assessor. This process is working smoothly.
- In response to qu. 7 and 8: Reports cover distances as far as Waratah. The impact from fine material is a concern for the community in the outer suburbs. All registered reports have been mapped and are being investigated by the assessors. Test results from the university campus at Callaghan and Maryland sites have come back negative. The Emergency Operations Committee (EOC) is using all of the data available to determine the extent of the impacts.
- In response to qu. 10 and 32: After each assessment is complete, arrangements are made to remove any asbestos waste. The property owner will receive a clearance certificate from the asbestos assessor to provide assurance once their property has been cleared of any asbestos waste. It is the responsibility of the individual property owners to contact their insurers.

Communications

- In response to qu.25: The Newcastle City Council website is the central point for all communications.
- In response to qu. 22: The NSW Police are providing daily updates on Facebook. The EPA is providing updates through Facebook, Twitter and the EPA website. These all link to the Newcastle City Council website.
- A factsheet will be prepared to address key questions raised in the community.
- In response to qu. 9: A public meeting took place on Wednesday 2 March 2022. At this meeting Mr Humphries confirmed that their request for an emergency SMS service was denied.
- In response to qu. 27 and 36: Another public meeting is being held on Friday at 5.30pm and will most likely take place at the Good Life Church. This is being convened by NSW Police as the incident coordinator.
- A letter box drop was suggested to distribute the factsheet. Mr Tola offered to assist with the distribution.
- Radio and newspaper print was also suggested as additional communication platforms.

The EPA and council were thanked for their efforts in response to the incident. Staff involved are working long days to protect impacts to human health. EPA and council attendance at this meeting had been prioritised in order to assist with the communications in the community. The importance of proactive communications was acknowledged. The committee were asked to act as conduit between the EPA and broader community to assist with this.

4. General Business

4.1. Other

The next quarterly meeting will take place on Monday 16 May 2021 at 5.30pm. An additional out of session meeting was suggested to take place for a further update on the fire incident in a few weeks.

Action Item No	Action	Person Responsible
1	Confirm the quantity and location of air monitoring equipment	David Clarke
2	A second out of session NCCCE meeting to be organised	Gina Bradley

Addendum:

Mr Banyard does not accept the above minutes as an accurate reflection of the meeting. This was expressed in writing on 10 March 2022 and at a subsequent meeting on 28 April 2022.

The minutes have been changed to annotate which questions from **Tab 1** were responded to during the meeting. These changes were requested at the meeting on 28 April 2022.

Tab 1:

Questions provided by Mr Banyard on behalf of the local community:

1. Following a request from members at a community meeting Rick Banyard as an NCCCE Community Representative requested John Tate, as Chair, to call a meeting of the EPA's NCCCE to be briefed in order to help inform the community.
2. The community is very upset with the EPA as the feeling is that little is being done. What has been done to date and what is the ongoing plan?
3. It seems the complaints line was a problem. Is this correct? How were after hours calls handled?
4. There is a lack of knowledge about how to contact the EPA and or register their impact. What steps were taken to distribute contact information?
5. Islington Park was surrounded with marker tape on Wednesday afternoon but there were no signs to indicate what the tape was for. (on Thursday morning there were some signs that said "Danger Park Close" however there is no indication why. (large numbers particularly bike riders ignored the warning and the tapes were cut as it the tape was the finishing line for the Tour De France.)

Who erected the tape? What was the purpose of the tape?

Did the EPA recommend the tape?

When will the area be deemed safe and the tape removed?

Who is responsible for compliance?

6. The closure of the Park does not seem to be supported by any actions related to adjoining roadways, public land and private property.

Are areas outside the Park and other designated areas totally safe?

7. It would seem that the extent of the impacted area is largely unknown. It was reported that the Mater Hospital was filthy, that Station St Waratah and Georgetown, Tighes Hill TAFE Campus and Islington School were impacted.

What role did the EPA play in closing some areas?

What methods of clean up did the EPA recommend?

How were contaminated areas determined?

How were non contaminated areas determined?

Is it correct that many hosed areas were washed into watercourses?

8. A map of the impacted area is urgently needed.

Has a map of impacted areas been developed?

Does the map identify by grade of contamination?

9. There was no SMS emergency danger messaging of the community. (the Council have done flood alerts)

Why did the EPA not distribute danger messaging?

How did the EPA distribute information to the community and the media?

10. Is it the responsibility of the EPA to inform insurance companies, planning authorities, Council and other bodies that the lands under the plume and associated areas are contaminated or potentially contaminated with asbestos and possibly other chemicals?

11. The community has been advised that the clean-up of environmentally harmful substances e.g. asbestos could take 12 months or more. Does the EPA have a 12-month timeline of actions?

12. Vehicles and people movements are spreading the fallen material.

Are vehicles and people movement considered to be a risk?

13. The rain is, in the short term, reducing the impact and masking the potential.
What will be the risk as the material dries out and what actions should the community take to mitigate the risk?
14. What is impact on waterways as this material is washed into drains and creeks?
15. What is the impact of the roof top material that drains into rainwater tanks?
16. Who does the EPA consider is responsible to clean up the asbestos and other fire related substances from roofs, gutters, trees and other above ground surfaces?
17. Does the EPA consider motor vehicles to be part of the contaminated property. Will the EPA be organizing and paying for the professional decontamination?
18. Has the origin of the building roofing been identified as the origin of the material can impact on the potential harm.
19. Is it correct that the analysis of a fallen sample has identified at least three type of asbestos? (Chrystile Asbestos (white asbestos), Amosite Asbestos (brown asbestos), Crocidolite Asbestos (“this is the most toxic, dangerous, and outright lethal form of the material out there”)?
What variants as the EPA samples identified?
What does the EPA consider the risk to the community is? (both short and long term)
20. Has the EPA identified other substances that have been released into the atmosphere, soil, water or wasted as a result of the fire or the clean up?
21. How will the demolition material be handled and disposed of in order to meet EPA standards?
22. There is an urgent need for quality environmental information to be dispersed in the community. How can this be done?
23. The incident should be treated as if a 'Asbestos Bomb' has gone off showering the surrounding streets and homes in contamination.
Does the EPA accept this concept?
24. Literally every exterior surface over an area as large as 20 to 30 square kilometres is contaminated asbestos debris. Roads, footpaths, the nature strip, cars, lawns and residents' homes and backyards.
Does the EPA agree with this assessment?
Is the primary product super Six made by James Hardie? If not, what is it?
Have the two destroyed wool stores been reroofed since being erected in the early 1940's? Is when and what with?
25. Does the EPA have Single easy to access source of information and advice?
Is it updated in real time?
26. The safe removal of the asbestos is a time sensitive matter otherwise the long-term health risks could be exacerbated.
What does EPA recommend as a safe timeframe?
27. Direct communication with affected residents to get them updated with the decontamination process and schedule is essential.
How can this be achieved?
28. The major concern is the microparticles that cannot be picked up and when they become airborne once the weather dries. The issue is that specialised HEPA vacs cannot be used while the ground is wet.
How can microparticles be addressed?

29. What are legal safe levels of Asbestos in residential environments?
30. How does the EPA recommend that lawns and parkland be made safe?
31. Who is legally and financially liable for the safe removal of the Asbestos, the rendering of the neighbour safe for current residents and the future? (As well any potential ill health both physical and mental to residents and their children in the years to come).
32. How will the EPA mitigate the possibility of property devaluation due the incident and result contamination and sigma? Will the EPA issue certificates of cleanliness?
33. What measures will the EPA take to ensure the remaining Wool store buildings (and other similar Hunter Valley properties will not put the community at risk during fires, floods and other natural disasters?
34. It is common for the residents to have vegetable gardens, water tanks and fruit trees etc. Are these safe for consumption by humans and pets?
35. What role does the EPA have in ensuring that residents (and businesses) can return into their environmentally safe properties?
36. Will the EPA sponsor a public briefing within the next 14 days?