

Number: 2015/05

## CERG Position Paper

### Release of addresses of Mr Fluffy houses

Attn: Taskforce Head

#### 1. TOPIC

There have been repeated requests to the ACT Government and the ACT Asbestos Taskforce to release the official list of addresses for houses identified as contaminated by Mr Fluffy amosite asbestos insulation. CERG is concerned that the release of the list has potentially negative implications for affected homeowners and their neighbours. At the same time, knowing affected addresses is very important for other interested parties for health and safety reasons- people such as neighbours, in-home service providers, including tradespeople, care givers and former Mr Fluffy homeowners and residents. Also, people vacating affected houses may not want to live near another affected house and will need to have certainty about this when seeking a new home.

#### 2. CERG COLLECTIVE POSITION

**Our proposal is that the addresses of Mr Fluffy houses should not be released until each has been purchased by the ACT Government and vacated by the owner or tenant. This option would result in an accumulation of the addresses on the list as they are acquired by the ACT Government. However it does not address the issue of previous home owners, neighbours and tenants and tradespeople seeking information about affected houses for health reasons or for future purchase.**

**Therefore, it is also recommended that the official list be made available, as proposed by the Chief Minister, in July through a publicly available website as a data base rather than a published list. This will have a search function to identify specific houses, through their address, for interested parties (as mentioned above). A public release of the list is not recommended for “general consumption”. People seeking to access the list will be assumed to have a particular interest in specific houses on the list.**

#### 3. BACKGROUND

There have been several FOI requests to release the official list of Mr Fluffy houses and to date the requests have been denied. The release of the addresses has been proposed to happen at the end of the scheme “opt in” period, 30 June, 2015. There are a number of inaccurate unofficial lists in circulation in different sectors of the ACT community – construction, real estate – which have been used for various purposes, mostly for financial gain. The arguments of public interest and public health have mostly dominated the calls for the release of the full official list. Every Mr Fluffy house is already tagged and there will in addition be stringent maintenance requirements to protect those who continue to live in these houses.

The value of the public release of the list has yet to be determined, but CERG has identified two additional concerning possible consequences.

Firstly, a published list might be used for marketing purposes, targeting people who are already recognised to be traumatised and vulnerable because of their circumstances.

Secondly, a fundamental strategy of the current remediation plan is that the resumed, cleared blocks of land will have their asbestos records expunged and they will then be provided with a fresh Crown lease. This plan could be jeopardised if a published list remains available.

### **CERG PERSPECTIVE**

It is the unanimous CERG view that the addresses not be released until each house has been vacated and that each address be released upon relinquishment. However, during this time there should be ready access to information for those with valid health and safety concerns. This position is argued as owners and tenants, especially older homeowners, already feel stigmatised by living in a Mr Fluffy house and public release of this information will certainly increase this distress. The houses may become objects of interest in the local neighbourhood and residents may bear the brunt of personal criticism and their houses might even be vandalised (which will increase the asbestos risk). This will only add to their current distress.

CERG does recognise the benefit of ready access to information in the interest of former home owners who may want to opt into the health research and for current Mr Fluffy homeowners who do not want to live in the near vicinity of another affected house when they move out of their homes.