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PLUMBERS HELP RAISE AWARENESS FOR ASBESTOS DISEASES

ASBESTOS hit the headlines recently when it was discovered in products used at the new Perth Children's Hospital.

But there's a significant danger facing many more of us every day – and that's exposure to asbestos used in up to one third of Australian homes – in fact any buildings constructed before the mid-1980s.

The Asbestos Diseases Society of Australia (ADSA) says there's a "fourth-wave" of sufferers coming to light now – and that's people who have been unwittingly exposed to asbestos in their everyday lives. The first wave was asbestos miners, the second factory workers manufacturing products containing asbestos, and the third builders and tradespeople who used it on a daily basis in their work.

The fourth wave – which is expected to include an estimated 50,000 sufferers over the next decade – is home renovators, handymen and tradespeople such as plumbers and electricians that may be unwittingly exposed to the asbestos used in domestic building over the years. It also includes people who may be exposed to asbestos fibres purely by being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

It's something the Master Plumbers and Gasfitters Association of WA (MPGA) takes very seriously and that's why the association is raising funds to help ADSA support research into treatments and cures.

And the MPGA has two worthy participants who have become the faces of the campaign.

Dean Harnett is a Perth-based plumber who spends his working hours dealing with blocked drains, and pens lyrics and records songs in his spare time.

Brett Peake played for the Dockers and St Kilda and now is one of the leading goal scorers for East Fremantle. But he also works as a mentor to plumbing apprentices and is all too aware of the risks the next generation faces in their daily work.

"Most kids who grew up in Western Australia through the 1980s, 90s and beyond were probably exposed to asbestos on a daily basis," Peake said.

"Now that we really understand the full impact it can have – and that might not become apparent for 20 to 40 years after exposure – we need to be vigilant in ensuring risks are minimized.

"One of the responsibilities I have in mentoring young apprentices is to ensure they are aware of the ease with which they and the people around them could become exposed to asbestos."



Inspired by the death of a friend's father from mesothelioma a few years ago, Harnett penned *Mystery Blue*, a song which provides a painfully clear story of the suffering caused by the mysterious fibres contained in blue asbestos.

"Let's be realistic – a lot of us have grown up and worked around asbestos," Harnett said. "We've lost a lot of people in the plumbing industry and the reality is there's worse to come."

But Peake and Harnett are not just pinup boys for the cause – they will take part in ADSA's Annual Walk for Research and Awareness, which takes place between Geraldton and Perth from September 10-16.

Participants are not expected to walk the entire way, but to complete legs of up to 20km a day over the week-long walk. That's just as well for Peake, although he has the level of fitness to no doubt go the distance. With East Fremantle looking increasingly likely to reach the WAFL finals, he may have to come and go around training and playing commitments. But he aims to walk every kilometre possible.

Harnett admits he's not the fittest bloke on earth, but he's been in training and hopes to put in a big performance.

Funds are being raised in two ways. With support of the MPGA, Harnett recorded *Mystery Blue* to CD and that is being sold over counters at a range of stores including Reece and Galvins, as well as from ADSA's Osborne Park headquarters.

There's also a fundraising page, which can be found by going to chuffed.org and searching for "plumbers". It provides more details on asbestos related diseases, the campaign and includes a video of *Mystery Blue*.

Peake said there was still a long way to go for MPGA to reach its target of \$30,000, which will be added to funds raised by ADSA and donated to leading mesothelioma researcher and oncologist Professor Anna Nowak, who works through UWA and Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital.

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