

Taranaki Daily News

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Publication: TNL **Date:** 11 Aug 2007

Headline: Asbestos fright for the force; Copper thieves spread deadly dust

Author: HUMPHREYS Lyn

Section: NEWS **Sub Section:** NATIONAL

COPPER thieves covered in **asbestos** dust closed two Taranaki police stations yesterday in a major health scare. The Stratford and Hawera stations and three of their patrol cars were off limits during the wide scale clean-up. Office staff were sent home for the morning and uniformed officers were sent out on patrol.

The seven arrested men were caught in the act of stealing copper guttering and pipes at the old Stratford maternity hospital about 5am on Wednesday. The white dust on the arrested men wasn't spotted until late on Wednesday when both the Labour Department and health authorities were informed. By then they had contaminated the two stations, patrol cars and police officers' uniforms.

"We have to treat it accordingly and we have done," Senior Sergeant Mike Hannah, of Hawera, said.

The arrested men had all their clothing removed, they were showered and asked to put on police issue boiler suits. They were then returned to clean cells in both Hawera and Stratford. The offenders had obviously not carried out any hazard identification before going on to the job, he joked.

"But I don't think they care.

"We had the same problem at Hawera Hospital and tried to get the message out that it's quite dangerous.

"Obviously, they haven't read the OSH handbook on how to dress when dealing with asbestos."

On a more serious note, police had been put at risk, as well as the offenders and their own families, he said.

Taranaki District Health Board facilities overseer Richard Guy said the **asbestos**, in the basement of the former maternity centre, was no danger to anyone "until these idiots got into it at the weekend".

Health and safety consultant Dora Smith, who supervised the clean-up for police, gave the all-clear to return to the station before lunchtime yesterday.

Air filter samples from the police stations were sent to Capital Environmental Services, of Wellington, analysed and had come back clear.

"It has caused a huge problem. All clothes had to be bagged and sealed and disposed of in the correct manner."

Results to confirm whether or not the white dust from the Stratford site contained **asbestos** would not be available until Monday.

"We won't know for certain until they come back. But we had to assume it was until proven otherwise."

Mrs Smith has given the message to the men found on site. "I told them what I thought of them. They are putting their own lives at risk and those of their family and their own children."

Health checks for all those possibly affected _ the alleged offenders and police _ would be ongoing, she said.

Airborne **asbestos** can cause debilitating asbestosis in the lungs and mesothelioma, a rare cancer of the lung lining.

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Headline: Asbestos dust forces costly clean - up for police

Author: HUMPHREYS Lyn

LABORATORY tests have confirmed **asbestos** was the white dust that closed down two Taranaki police stations on Friday. And while the stations have re- opened, the clean-up operation has now spread to the old Stratford hospital buildings.

The problem started last Thursday when police arrested a gang of copper thieves inside the abandoned Stratford hospital. The men were covered in **asbestos** dust, which they unwittingly spread through several police cars and the Stratford and Hawera stations.

Yesterday afternoon health and safety consultant Dora Smith, of New Plymouth, said tests had established the dust was **asbestos**. The copper thieves had left a lot of angry people in their wake, she said.

"It was crass stupidity that put so many people at risk _ all because of their greed."

There was now a large clean-up bill to be paid by police.

The old hospital was now contaminated and the copper thieves had put their own lives at risk, she said.

Publication: TNL **Date:** 14 Aug 2007 **Page:** 0 1
Headline: Councils moving to clean up Patea's eyesore works
Author: WOodd Richard

PATEA'S derelict, dangerous and contaminated freezing works could be demolished and removed, using millions of dollars in public funds.

The South Taranaki District Council and the Taranaki Regional Council will apply to the Ministry for the Environment's Contaminated Site Remediation Fund to carry out a full investigation of the works area.

The investigation, to determine the nature and extent of the contamination, will cost an estimated \$107,000. If approved, the ministry will pay 60% and the two councils 20% each. A response is expected by the end of this month.

The site is riddled with Asbestos cladding and insulation, chemicals, heavy metals, boiler ash dumps, rusting fuel storage tanks, collapsing structures and is a local hangout at night.

If, after the investigation, the ministry supports a Patea works clean-up, that would be funded in the same proportions. No one has yet put a cost on it, but at yesterday's district council meeting, \$4 million to \$5 million was being talked about.

A report by community development adviser Claire Symes said the site was a dangerous hazard.

Residents regarded the area as a health hazard and blamed its high visibility from the highway as being partly responsible for a decline in property values over the years. Ms Symes was opposed to community suggestions that the site be made safe for use. "It's a dangerous, scary place. There are huge risks if we do nothing. Delaying action will only result in the site further deteriorating and costing even more to deal with," she said.

Former Patea mayor Norm McKay, who worked at the freezing works for 29 years, said it was wonderful news.

"The works has been a thorn in everyone's side for 25 years. This eyesore is our identity, it's Taranaki's eastern gateway and it's absolutely shocking what's been allowed to happen there.

"A clean-up will be the start of a new era for Patea and Taranaki," he said.

Most of the buildings are owned by Escada Enterprises of Sydney. The other building owner is the district council _ it was disclosed yesterday that old records revealed it owns the fell mongery area, leased back to the former works owners, W. R. Fletcher Ltd, owned by the British Vesty family.

"Council, as an owner, has a clear responsibility to clean up the site," Ms Symes said. Literally nothing has been done with the site since the works closed in 1982. Escada initially bought the whole property off a bank, intending to set up ferret fur farming, but lost most of it in a mortgagee sale.