

MEDIA RELEASE

Tuesday 4 August

Premier Baird Abandons Asbestos Victims and abolishes NSW Dust Diseases Board

The NSW Government has this afternoon snuck through changes that it will disband the NSW Dust Diseases Board. It is believed that this comes as part of the WorkCover reforms announced today.

The Board, established in 1926, has acted as an independent arbiter in awarding claims to victims of asbestos exposure and their families.

“The custodianship of the dust diseases board has been the moral responsibility of every NSW Government and NSW Premier for over 85 years,” said AMWU National Secretary Paul Bastian.

“This is not simply a piece of Government bureaucracy. This board ensures that the many victims of one of Australia’s worst industrial killers are compensated and cared for.

“To casually announce that the Board will no longer exist shows a callous attitude that is beyond belief.”

AMWU NSW Secretary, Tim Ayres, was scathing about the Government’s decision.

“Mike Baird has delivered a kick in the guts to victims of asbestos exposure and their families. The numbers of victims of asbestos-related diseases are only rising. These families will have to wait longer when claiming compensation,” said Mr Ayres.

The decision to disband the board was not made public as part of the government’s announcement on workers compensation legislation earlier today.

Rather, board members received individual phone calls informing them of the Board’s disbanding.

“Not only is Mike Baird turning his back on the dying victims of asbestos exposure, but he doesn’t even have the guts to front up to his decision. Instead, board members were made aware of the decision through phone calls from junior bureaucrats,” said Mr Ayres.

In September 2014, the NSW Upper House inquiry into the Dust Diseases Board chaired by Liberal MP David Clarke found:

The overwhelming view of review participants is that the Dust Diseases Board and its compensation scheme are performing in an exemplary manner.

It is a rare feat for a government agency to receive such uniform praise from stakeholders.

The committee commends the board for performing its functions to such a high standard.

“The Government’s own committee has found that this is one of the most effective Agencies operating out of the NSW Government.

“Mike Baird and the NSW Government need to immediately reverse this decision.”

Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union

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