



LVAT

**Latrobe Valley
Asbestos Taskforce**

Latrobe Valley Asbestos Benchmark Survey

2019

REPORT



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BACKGROUND

The Latrobe Valley Asbestos Benchmark Survey 2019 is the first of a series to be conducted annually by the Latrobe Valley Asbestos Taskforce (LVAT), which was commissioned by the Victorian Government in 2019 to review how asbestos is managed, handled and disposed of in the Latrobe Valley. The scope of the taskforce is broad, and encompasses both public and private, residential, commercial and industrial sites and locations.

This initial survey provides insight into levels of awareness, knowledge and attitudes towards asbestos across the wider Latrobe Valley community.

The survey was devised to broadly align with the National Benchmark Survey¹ undertaken by the Asbestos Safety and Awareness Agency (ASEA)². In selected areas, identical questions have been used. This is to enable comparison of Latrobe Valley results with national trends.

As a source of baseline data, the results of this survey will support the future tracking of changes in these factors that result from engagement and educational activities, and other influences.

The survey was published online on the Engage Victoria platform³ and was open from 8 November to 8 December 2019, with hard copies available at various locations including Gippsland Asbestos Related Diseases Support group Inc. (GARDS), the Latrobe Valley Health Advocate office, local council service centres and libraries, the DELWP Traralgon office and other locations.

The Latrobe Valley Asbestos survey is in two sections: Section 1 is for the general community and also has additional questions for apprentices; Section 2 is an optional section for do-it-yourself (DIY) home renovators.

The survey was promoted broadly on social media, as well as in the local press. In total, 133 responses were received with 90 (68%) of these respondents also completing the DIY home renovators section; 13 completed hard copies were returned via mail. Of the 133 respondents, only 8(6%) had never either lived or worked in the Latrobe Valley.

The percentage of respondents aged below 25 was very low (2%), and as such the results cannot necessarily be considered to be representative of this age group.

¹ <https://www.asbestossafety.gov.au/research-publications/national-benchmark-survey-awareness-and-attitudes-asbestos-2018>

² <https://www.asbestossafety.gov.au/>

³ <https://www.engage.vic.gov.au>

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Latrobe Valley has long been linked to asbestos, with power stations primarily built using asbestos containing materials (ACMs) and consequently, many power station workers succumbing to asbestos related diseases.⁴ Of the survey respondents, nearly two in three (65%) have known someone who has died or whose health has been affected as a result of asbestos exposure.

Correspondingly, there is a high level of awareness of asbestos and asbestos related issues in the Latrobe Valley:

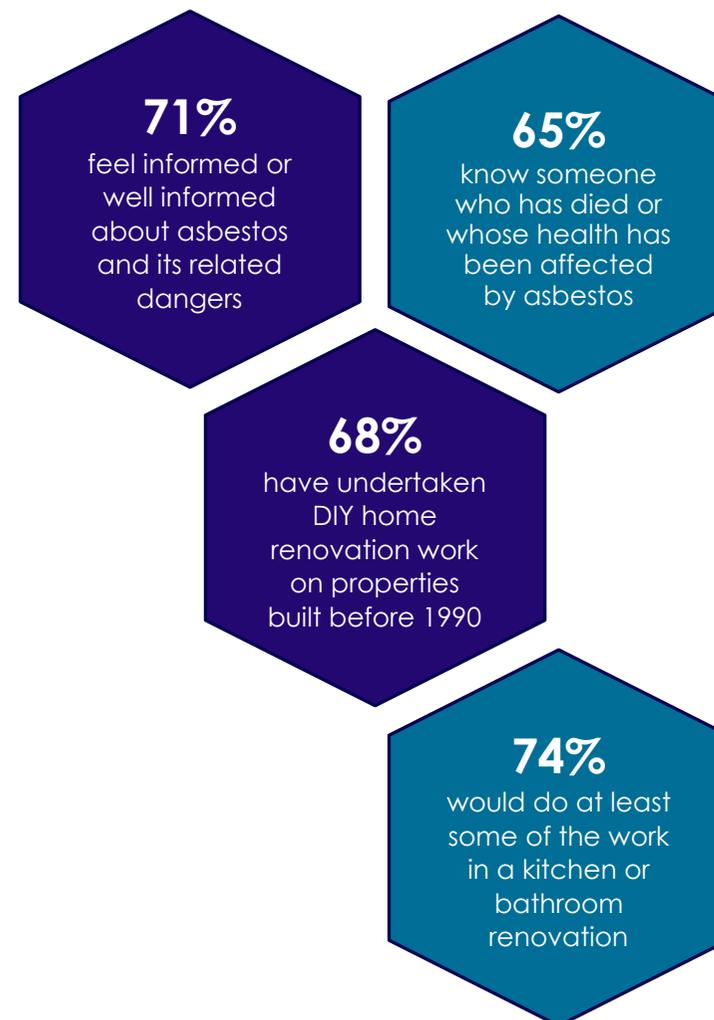
- 87% agree that asbestos is very common in Australian buildings
- 89% agree that even a small amount of asbestos can be very dangerous
- 98% agree that anyone doing renovations needs to be mindful of asbestos.

The two most highly rated concerns regarding asbestos are the health impacts and the illegal dumping of asbestos.

Home renovation is a popular activity, with 95% respondents indicating they have undertaken home renovations including as DIY home renovators:

- 68% reported that they have undertaken renovations on properties built prior to 1990
- 74% report that they would do at least some of the work themselves in a kitchen or bathroom renovation.

Many (39%) are confident in their own ability to identify asbestos containing materials but only 29% have had any formal training.



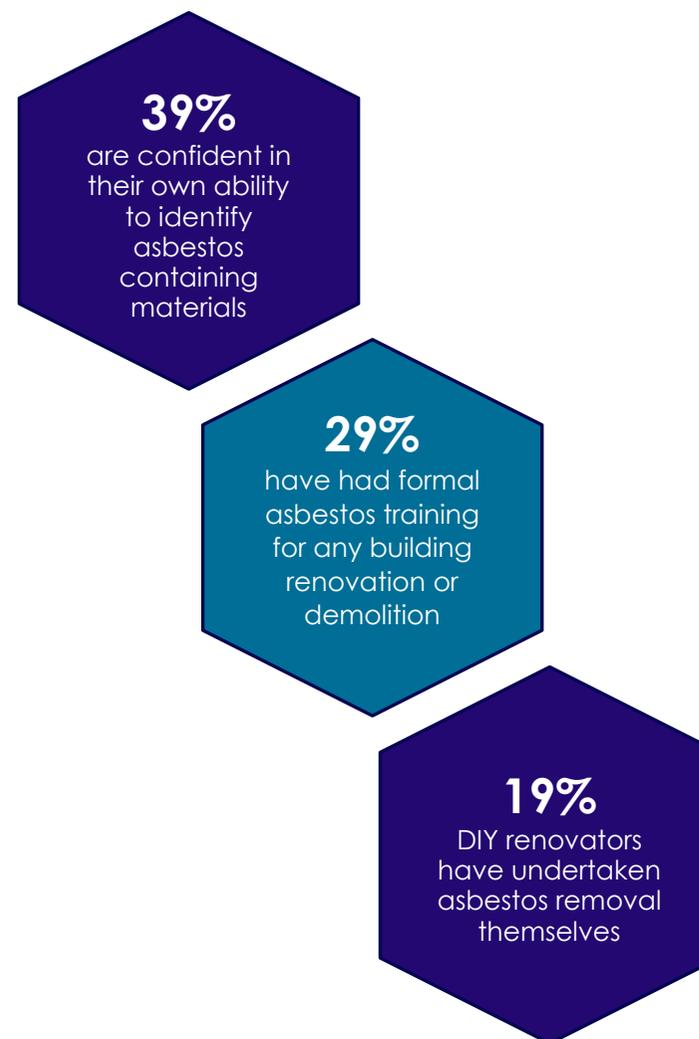
⁴ Begg, S., Vos, T. and Stone, C., Mesothelioma as a marker for asbestos-related lung disease in Victoria. Health of Victorians, The Chief Health Officer's Bulletin., 2001. 1: p. 10-12.

In the DIY home renovators section, two-thirds (67%) of the respondents report that they have undertaken home renovations in the past three years. Of concern is the 36% who undertook a risk of asbestos exposure assessment themselves, without engaging professionals.

While there is high level of agreement among DIY renovators that in principle, a licensed removalist ought to be engaged, almost 1 in 5 (19%) report having done the work themselves. Reasons for doing so include believing they had the skills/knowledge to remove asbestos properly (57%), and to save money (37%).

Two out of five (43%) DIY renovators surveyed intend to do renovations in the next 12 months comprising either internal or external works or both.

Overall, both sections of the survey reveal a demand for increased education, more accessible and low-cost disposal options, and greater levels of regulation and compliance.



SECTION 1 GENERAL POPULATION

Asbestos awareness

Information and messaging

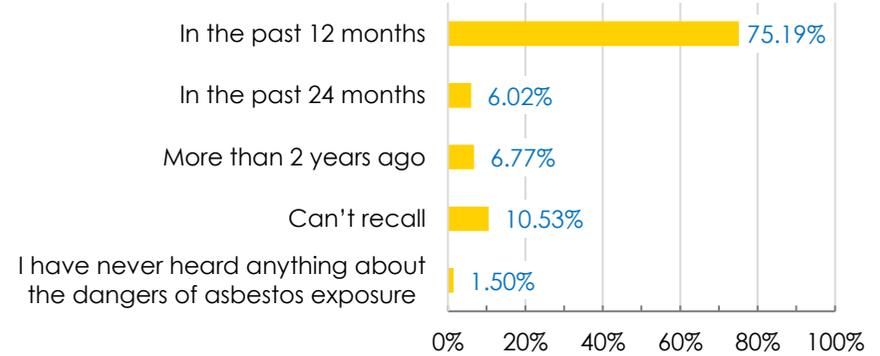
Of the 133 respondents to the survey, 71% feel informed or well informed about asbestos and its related dangers.

For those who were exposed to messages about the dangers of asbestos in the last 12 months (75%), 79% rate their knowledge of the dangers associated with exposure to asbestos as good or very good. This is a higher rate than for all respondents at just over 71%.

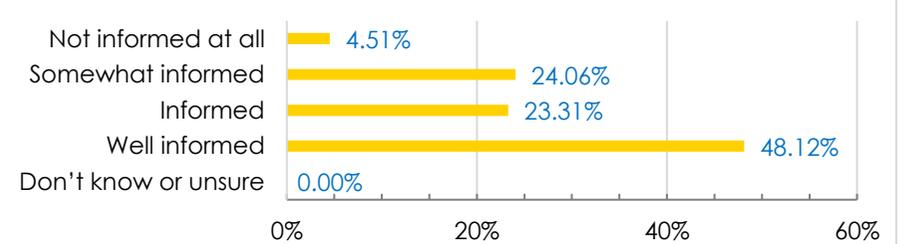
74% believe that it is very important for them to know about asbestos and its related dangers. This is in contrast to the national survey undertaken in 2018, which revealed that 59% believed it to be very important.

79%
Who have been exposed to asbestos messaging in the last 12 months rate their awareness as good or very good

Q1. When was the last time you saw or heard any messages about the dangers of asbestos exposure? (n=133)



Q2. How informed do you feel about asbestos and its related dangers? (n=133)



Q3. How important is it for you to know about asbestos and its related dangers? (n=133)

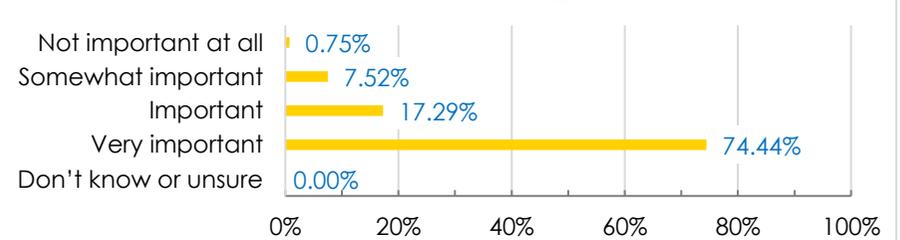
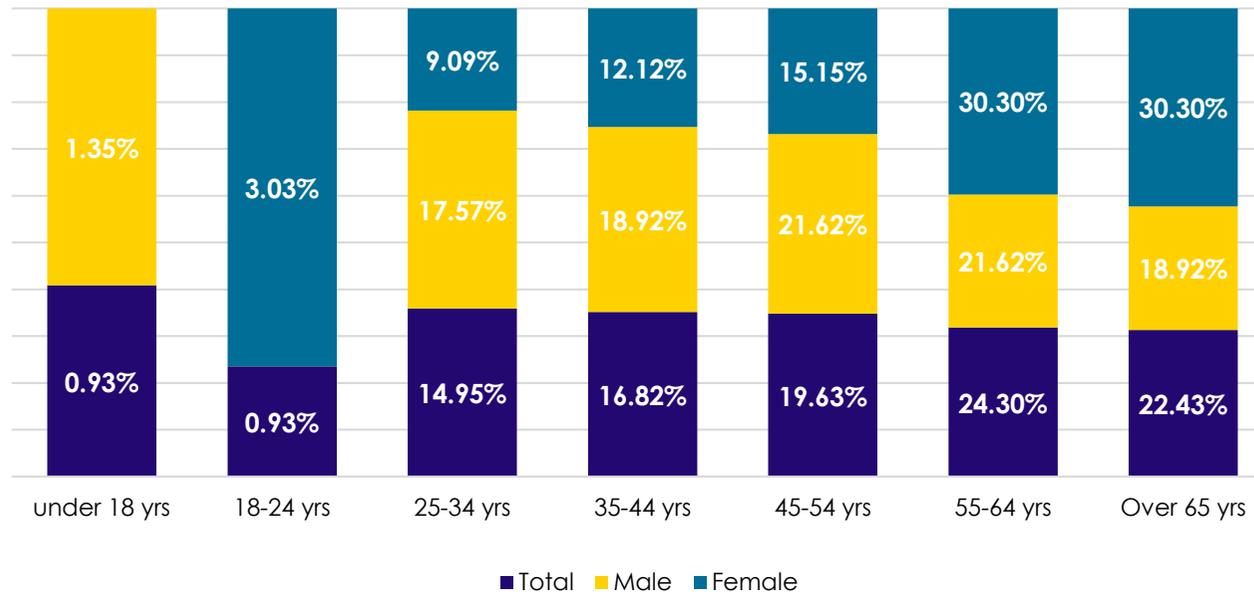


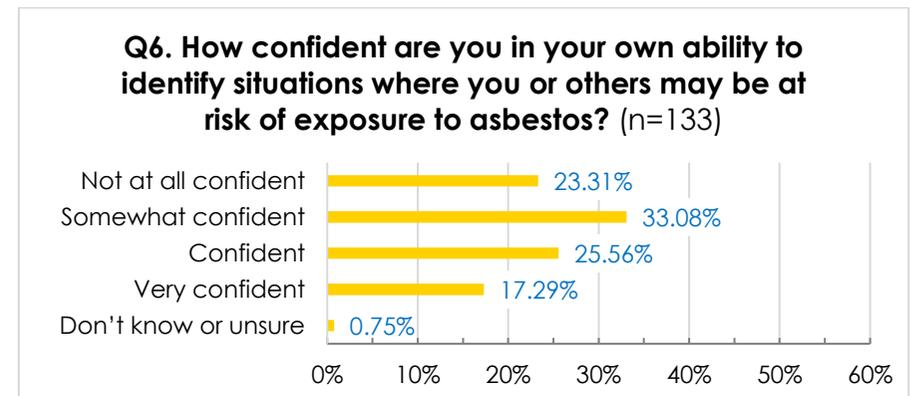
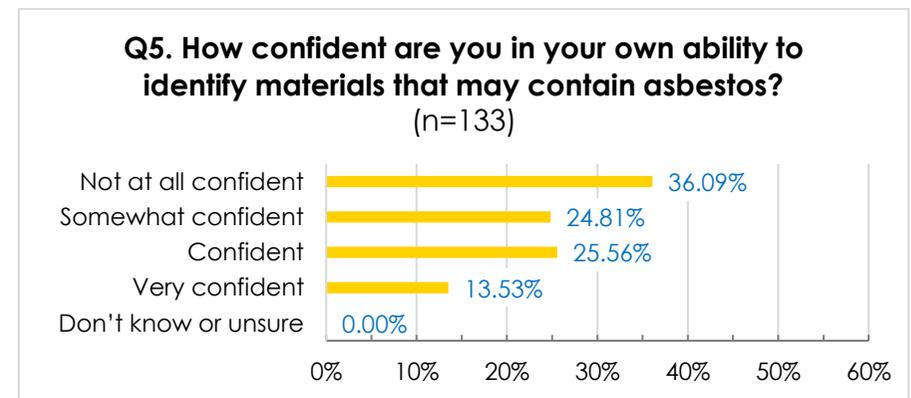
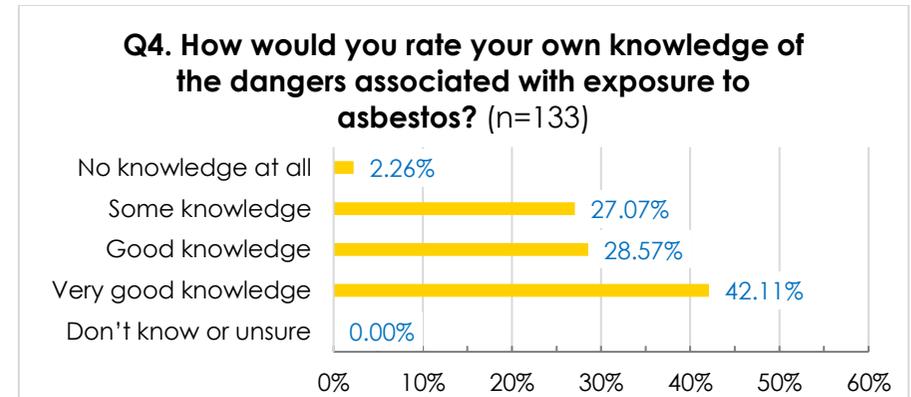
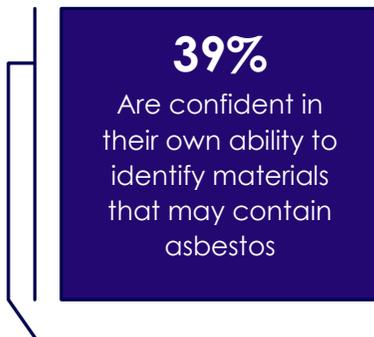
Table 1. Respondents who have been exposed to messages about the dangers of asbestos in the past 24 months by age and gender (n=107)



Identifying asbestos containing materials

71% in total rate their knowledge of asbestos-associated dangers as good or very good.

39% are confident or very confident in their own ability to identify ACMs, and 43% are confident in their own ability to identify situations where they or others may be at risk of exposure to asbestos.



Formal training

Of the respondents who have had formal training (29%), 26% said it was delivered in the workplace, and 33% via an external training organisation.

Free text comments also identified that five people had received training via their local council, with four of these specifying Latrobe City Council.

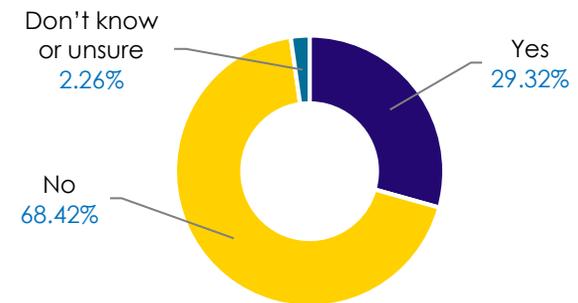
29%

have had formal training in how asbestos needs to be managed in any building renovation or demolition

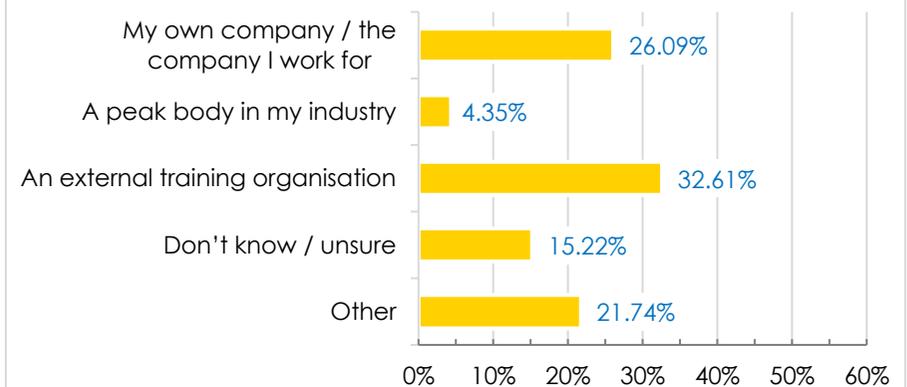
While only 29% have had formal training, 39% are confident or very confident in their ability to identify materials that may contain asbestos

Q7. Have you had any formal training in relation to asbestos and how it needs to be managed in any building renovation or demolition work?

(n=133)



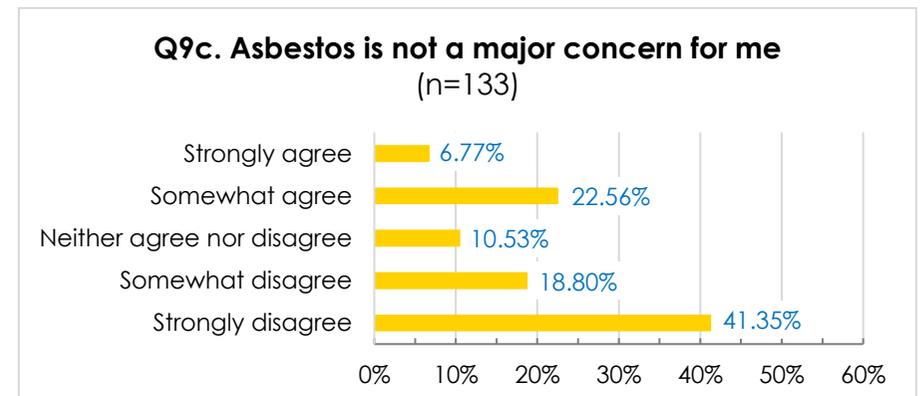
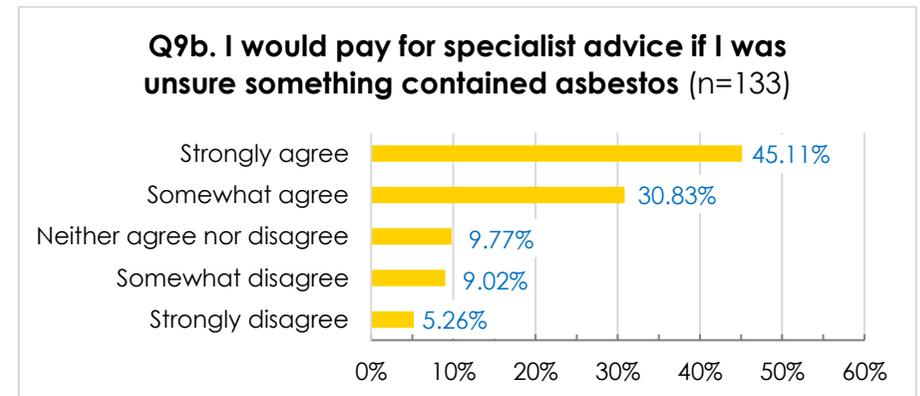
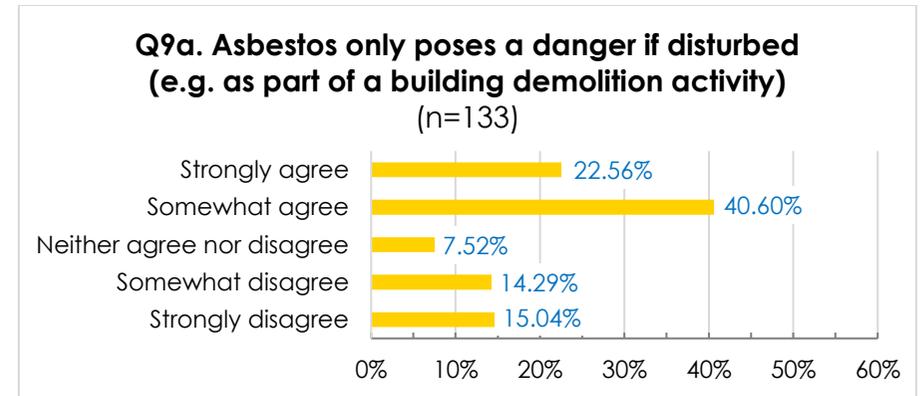
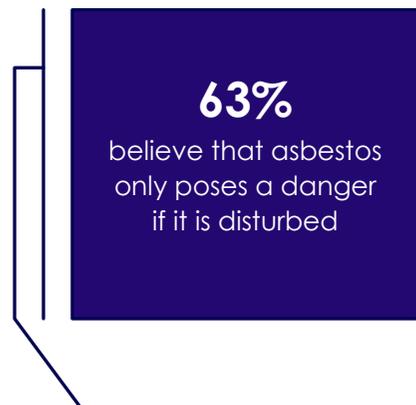
Q8. If you answered Yes to the question above, who delivered this training? (n=46)



Awareness of the dangers and presence of asbestos

For the series of questions 9a to 9f, respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each statement.

29% of respondents do not agree that asbestos only poses a danger when disturbed. Of the 75% of respondents who have been exposed to messages about the dangers of asbestos in the last 12 months, a slightly higher percentage of 35% do not agree that asbestos only poses a danger if disturbed.

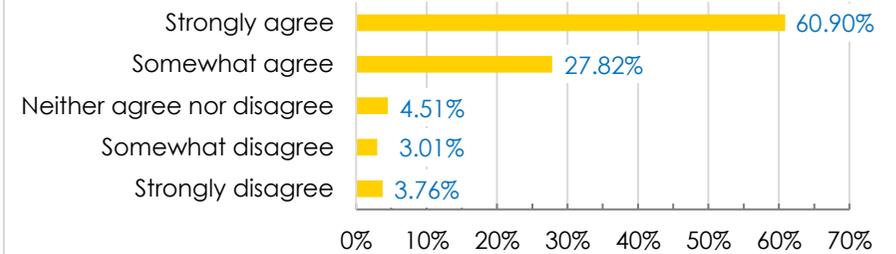


89%

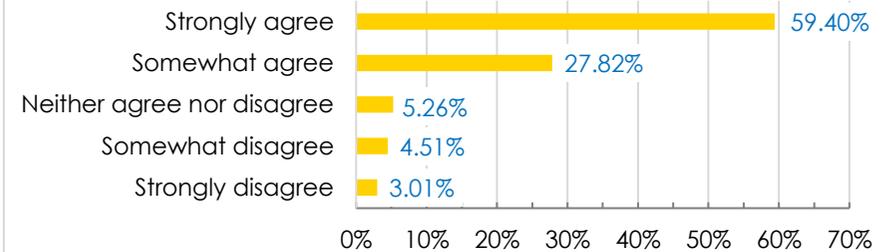
agree that even a small exposure to asbestos can be very dangerous

While my knowledge of asbestos is ok, I don't know what my neighbours know or are up to if they are doing renovations, so risk of exposure is always there

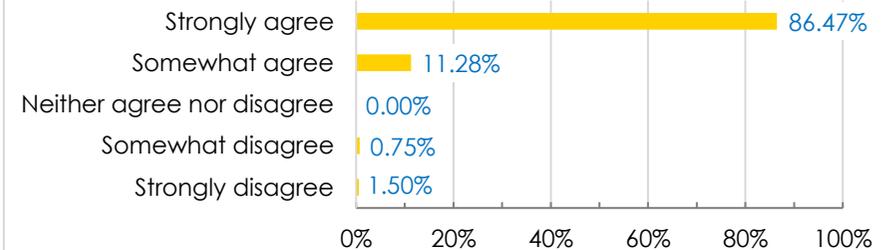
Q9d. Even a small exposure to asbestos can be very dangerous (n=133)



Q9e. Asbestos is very common in Australian buildings (n=133)



Q9f. Anyone doing renovations needs to be very mindful of asbestos (n=133)



Home renovation activity

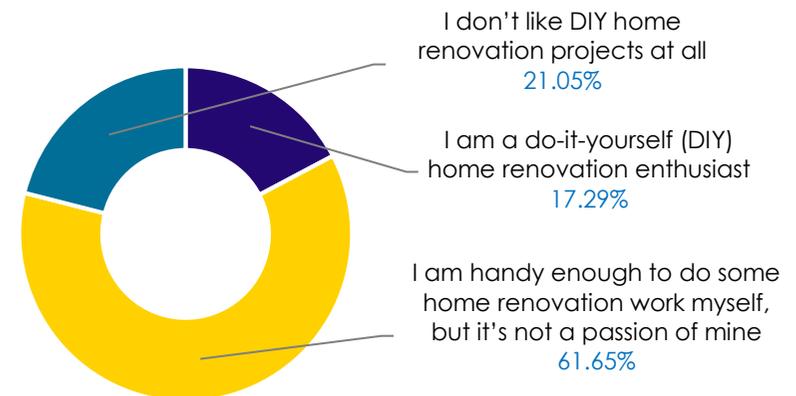
Many respondents undertake home renovation works themselves, with only 21% indicating they do not like DIY home renovation projects at all.

Three in four (74%) envisage that they would undertake at least some – if not all – of the work themselves in the renovation of a bathroom or kitchen.

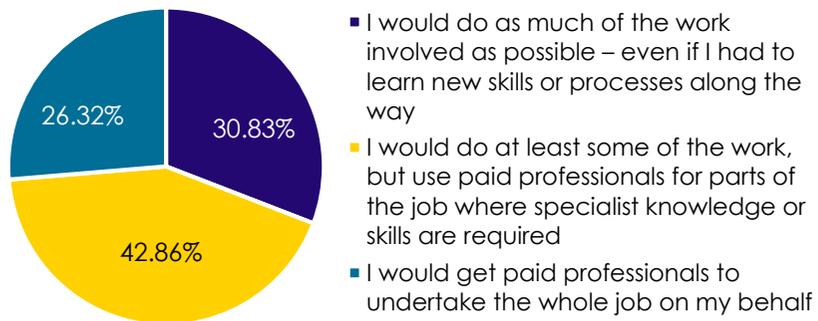
Of the DIY renovation work undertaken, the majority (68%) have worked on properties built before 1990.

Q11. Which of the following best describes you?

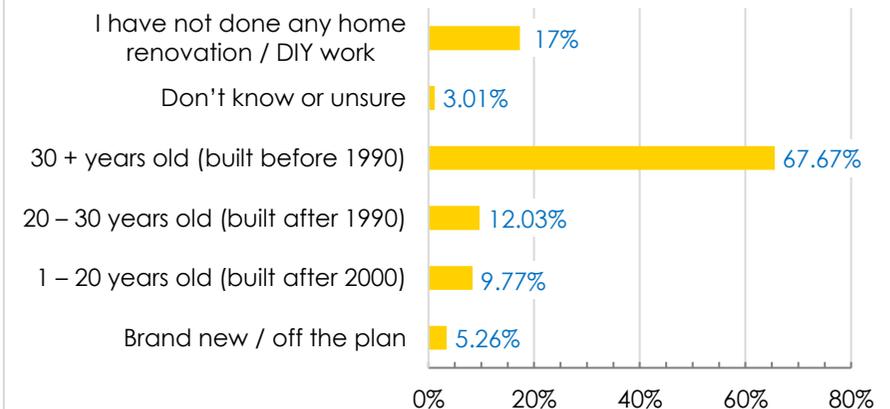
(n=133)



Q10. Imagine you need to renovate the bathroom or kitchen in your own home. Which of the following best describes how you would approach this? (n=133)



Q12. In terms of any home renovation / DIY work you have undertaken, roughly how old are the properties you have worked on? (n=133*)

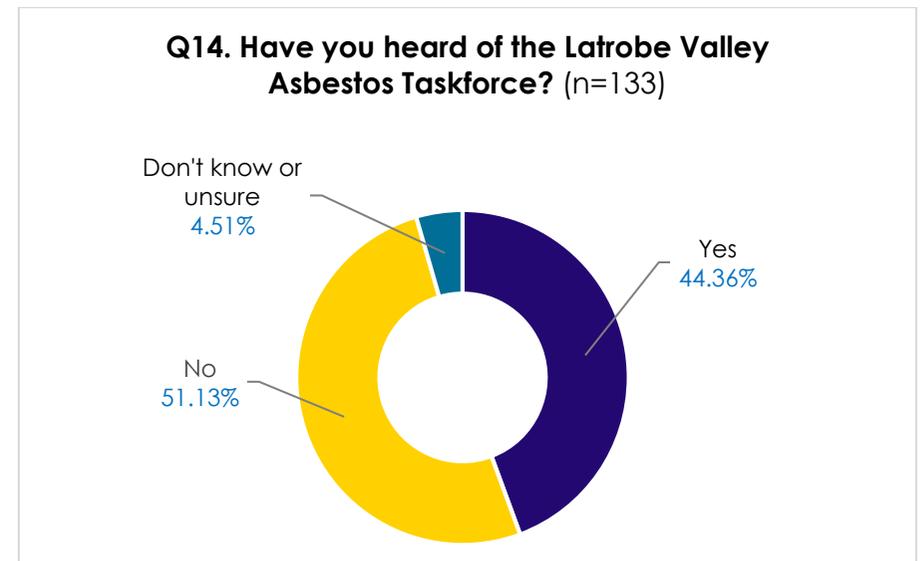
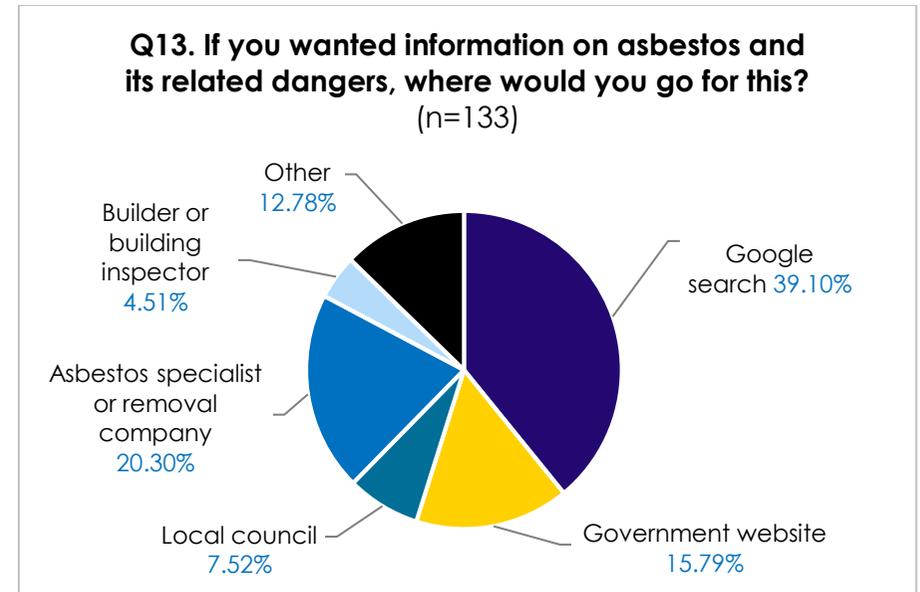


Where people go for information about asbestos

The internet – including government websites – is the primary source of asbestos information, with 39% using Google to search for information. This is followed by asbestos removal companies at 20%. There is a low reliance on local council (8%) and builders/building inspectors (5%).

Free text answers from other questions also revealed that a number of respondents (5%) mentioned GARDS⁵ as their source of information.

A fairly even spread of respondents has heard about the taskforce, with 44% answering Yes and 51% No.



⁵ Gippsland Asbestos Related Diseases Support Inc/Asbestos Council of Victoria

Concerns about asbestos

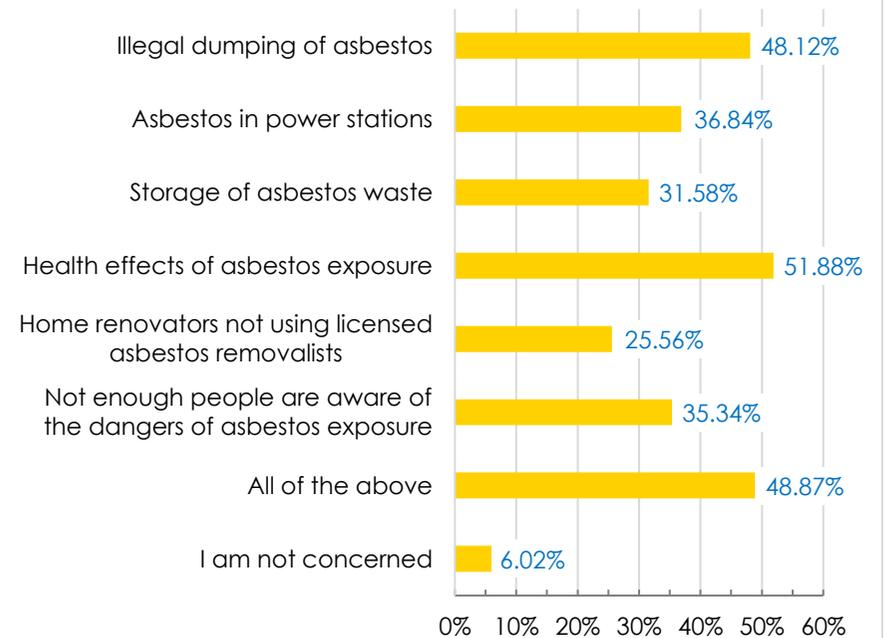
The community is concerned about many asbestos related issues in the Latrobe Valley, with health effects and illegal dumping predominating. One in three (35%) believe that not enough people are aware of the dangers of asbestos exposure, and one in four (26%) are concerned about home renovators not using licensed removalists. 37% are very concerned about asbestos in power stations.

Make disposal more accessible and FREE. If you don't it will just continue to be dumped up the bush or on the roadside.

We recently had asbestos removed from my work building. On a work day, with staff still working in the affected area. TERRIBLE.

Poor people are disproportionately affected by asbestos due to more often living in older houses (more affordable), or around dumping sites/industrial areas.

Q15. What concerns you the most about asbestos in the Latrobe Valley? (n=133*)



*This was a multi-select question and respondents were able to select more than one answer.

Personal impacts of asbestos

Nearly 2 in 3 know someone who has died or whose health has been affected by exposure to asbestos

It's an extremely horrible way to die and even worse to watch someone go through it. I lost my dad and his two brothers who died from it.

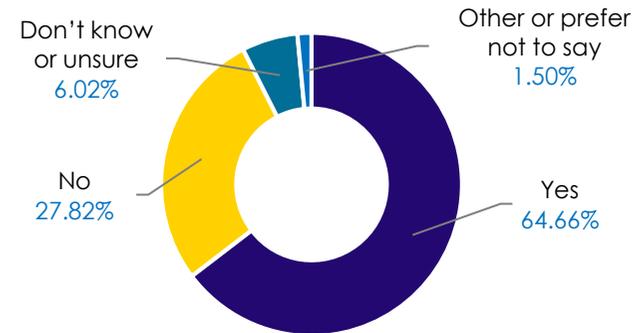
It killed my husband - there is no such thing as safe exposure to asbestos.

It has brought my world crashing down!!!!

Asbestos killed my mum and her three children are at risk too. All she did was work at a kindergarten during renovations, live in a home during renovations and be married to a husband who visited the docks.

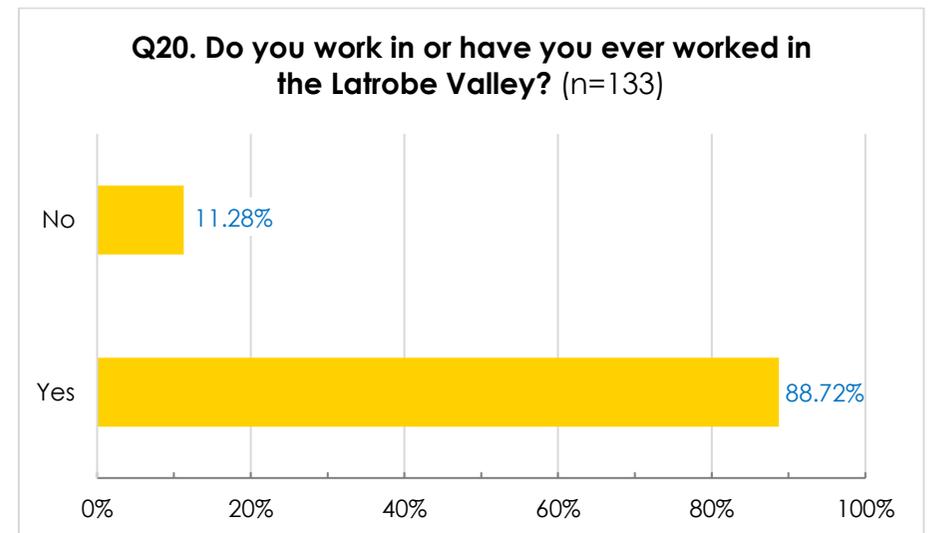
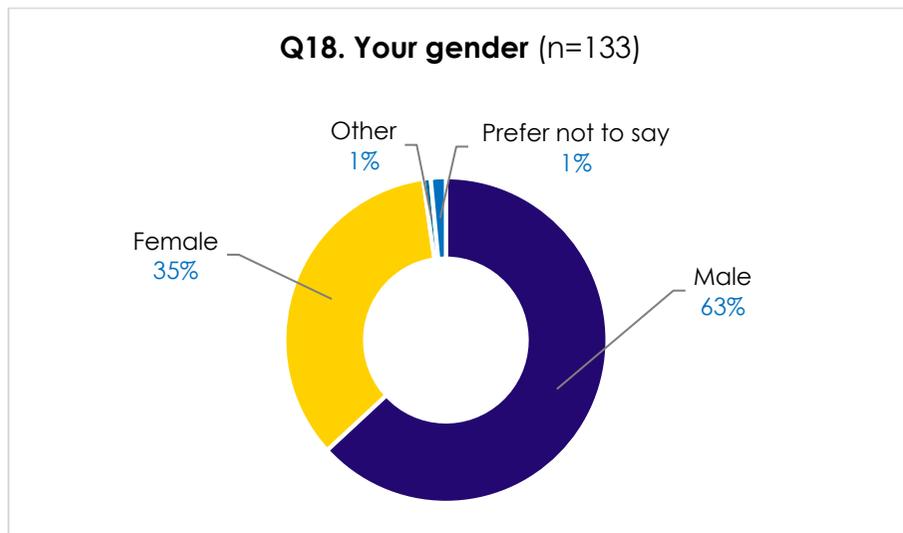
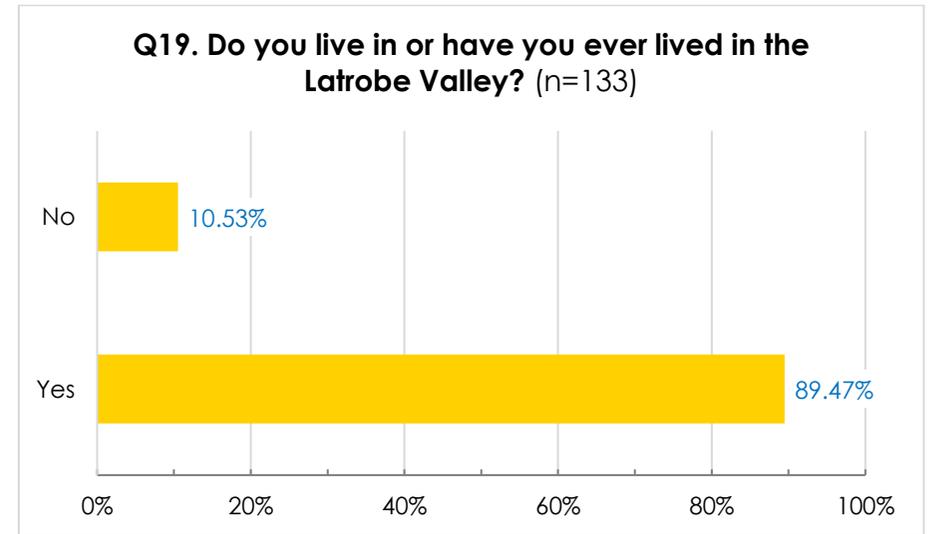
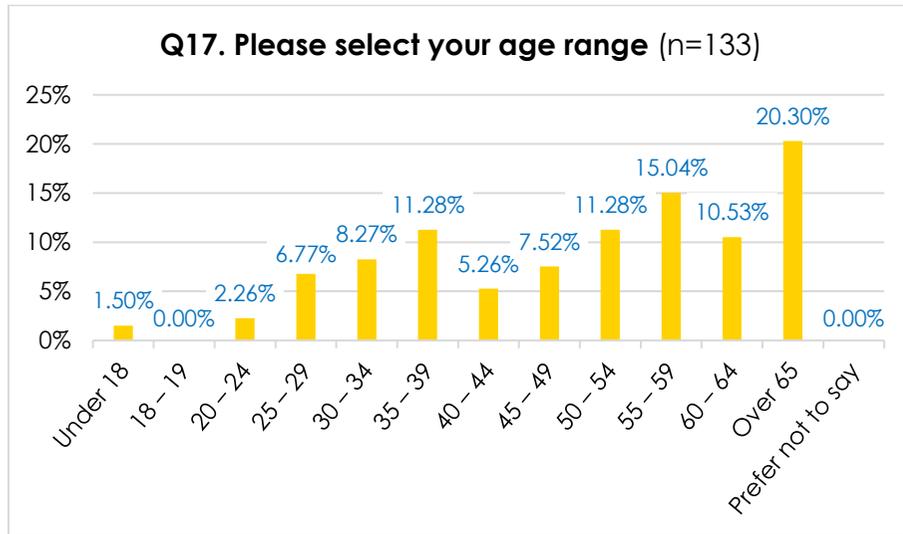
When I was 15 my first job was removing asbestos, I have scarring on the lungs!

Q16. Have you known someone from the Latrobe Valley who has died or whose health has been affected as a result of asbestos exposure?
(n=133)

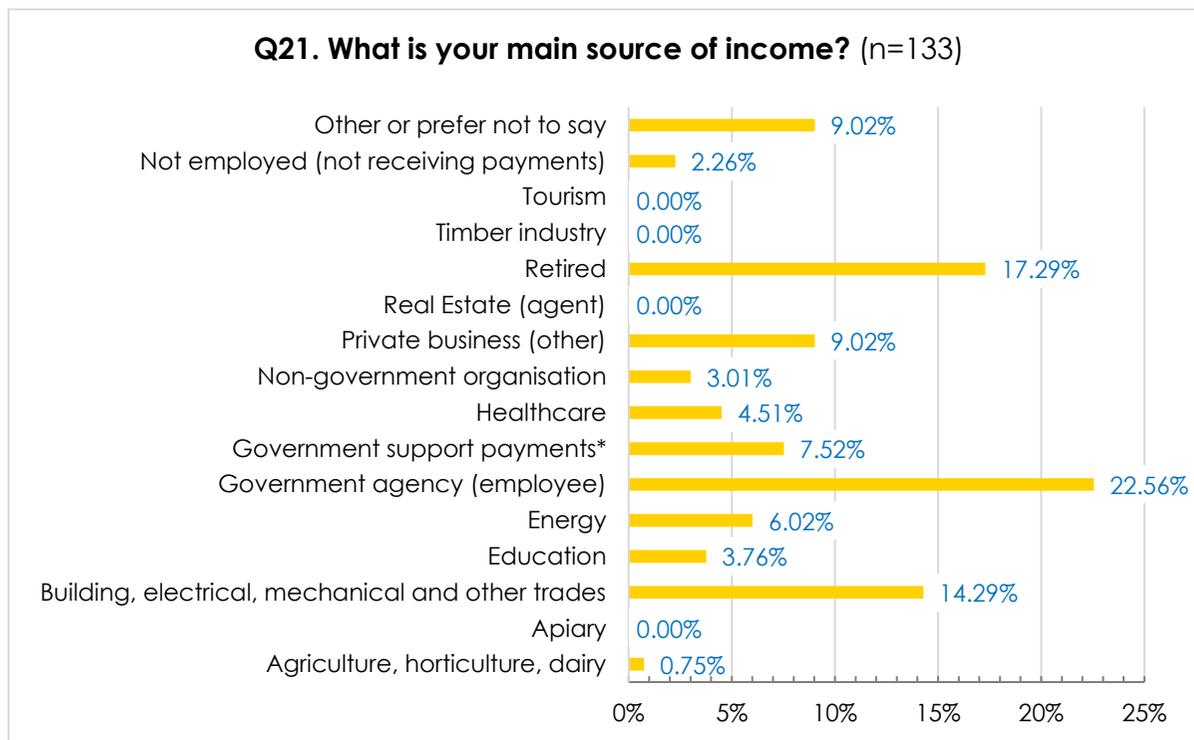


Demographics

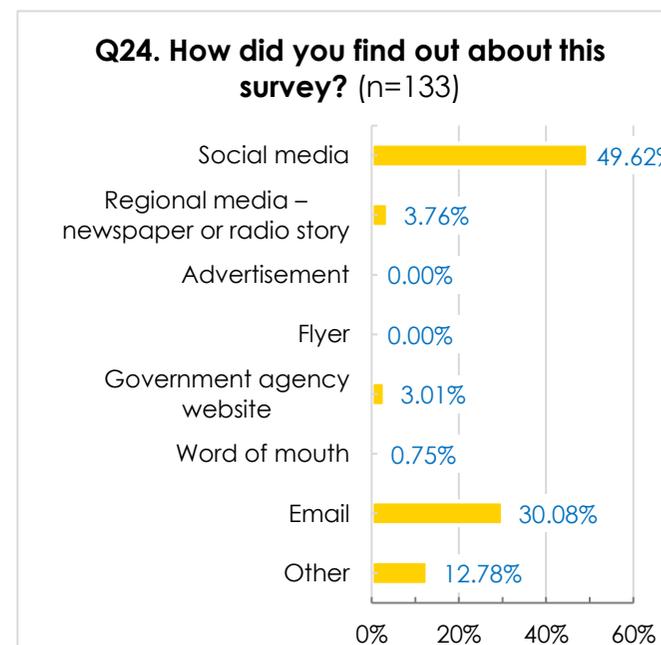
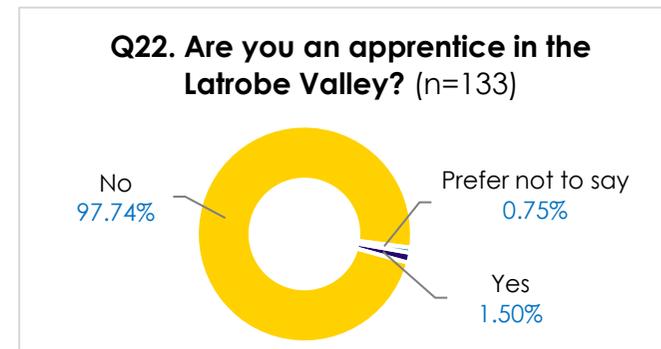
Of the 133 respondents, only 8(6%) had never either lived or worked in the Latrobe Valley. Male respondents (63%) significantly outnumbered Female respondents (35%). Almost half (46%) of the respondents were aged 55 years or older.



The highest number of respondents, 23%, work in a government agency; next are retired at 17% then trades at 14%. Only 2 respondents identified as apprentices.⁶ Half of the respondents found out about the survey on social media – predominantly Facebook – with nearly one third (30%) via direct email.



*(e.g. Newstart or Disability Support Pension)



⁶ Of those two identifying as apprentices the responses as to the field in which they are apprenticed are unclear as respondents have identified six job types in answer to this question. However, of these, the two most likely apprenticed positions appear to be sheet metal worker and electrical.

Further comments from the general section

Managing asbestos:

- “ “ I believe it should be a mandatory requirement for all dwellings built before 1990 to come with an inspection report detailing the presence of asbestos and its condition, to be provided upon sale or transfer of the dwelling. This should also apply to those dwellings used as rental properties ensuring the tenant/s are aware of the presence and condition of asbestos.
- “ “ Asbestos bins should be made available upon request and picked up for free with a once a year voucher with your rates, like hard rubbish.

Housing in the Latrobe Valley:

- “ “ Many homes and buildings in the Latrobe valley contain asbestos and asbestos walls and many people don't seem to understand or know this and would unwittingly be exposed, people deserve to know, maybe specific homes which are clearly made from asbestos could be targeting to educate the occupants.

Asbestos removal:

- “ “ I have concerns about the potential costs associated with asbestos removal and disposal, when removing asbestos from the workplace. I feel perhaps there should be subsidies.
- “ “ Asbestos removal should be paid for by the organisations that manufactured it, because of the expense for working families is too (sic) great and then tip fees and then councils...
- “ “ Need removal to be government funded to stop people removing it themselves.

Exposure through others' actions:

- “ “ Latrobe City Council makes disposal of asbestos quite affordable and yet still there are those in the community that don't seem to mind endangering others by dumping their asbestos!
- “ “ It's dangerous. When they demolished the old Traralgon hospital they had a few screens around and the workers had PPE, but the wind was blowing dust all over town, so the precautions are not very effective.
- “ “ ... I heard loud banging noises & investigated only to discover the next door neighbours were smashing down an asbestos shed, using no water, within metres of where my children were sitting on our trampoline... The debris was carted away dry in an open trailer tied on haphazardly with thin cords. Just appalling behaviour by the neighbours, but with no regulation enforcement or consequence.
- “ “ I have no time at all for home renovators. They are reckless, in my opinion, placing themselves & others at risk.

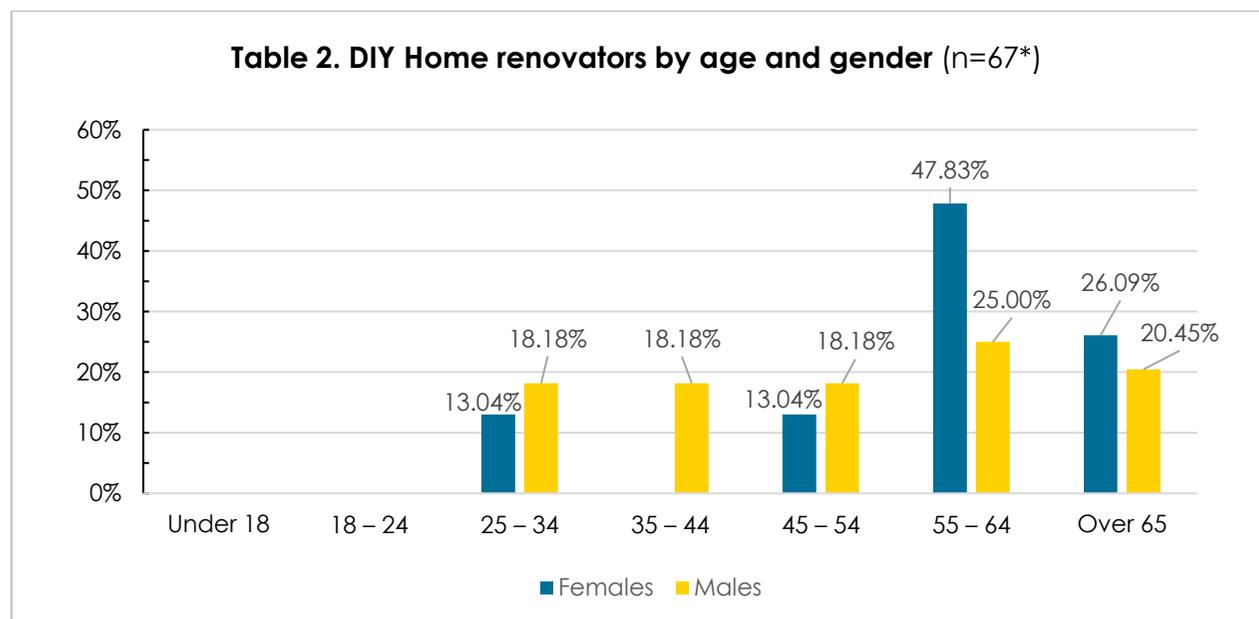
Reservations about the dangers of asbestos:

- “ “ People treat asbestos like smallpox or a dangerous animal in their kitchen... The fact that it exists will not hurt you, you just need to handle it correctly or get a qualified someone to handle it for you. I feel there's sometimes a little hysteria surrounding it.
- “ “ I feel the risks about asbestos are somewhat overstated.

SECTION 2 DIY HOME RENOVATORS ONLY

Of the 133 people who participated in the first section of the survey, 90 (68%) completed the second section on DIY home renovation. The majority of respondents were aged 55 and over (see Table 2 below).

The results suggest that DIY activity in the Latrobe Valley is high, with the majority of respondents (78%) doing at least some of the work themselves and two out of five (43%) planning to undertake renovations in the next 12 months.

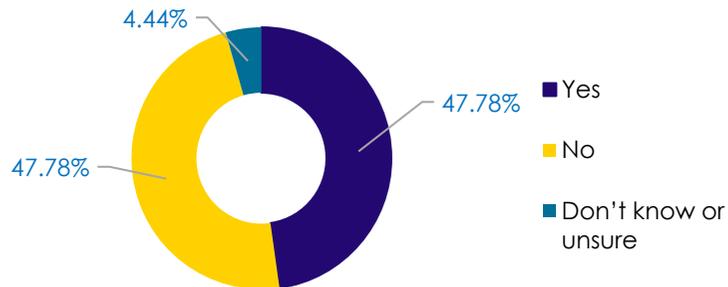


*Due to the way the data was collected, it was not possible to align the data of every respondent in Section 2 with the data collected in Section 1. Only 67 responses could be matched and therefore not every respondent in the DIY Home renovator section (n=90) is included in this chart.

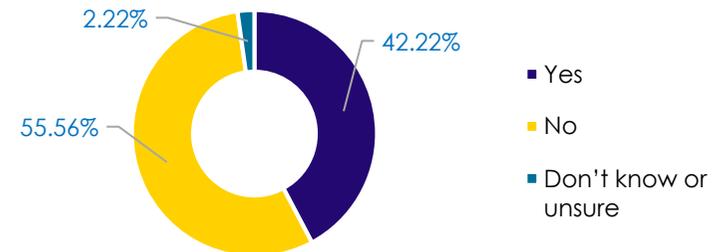
Recent works on properties built between 1940 – 1990

Q.1 Over the past 3 years, have you ever undertaken any of the following to a residence built or renovated between 1940 and 1990:

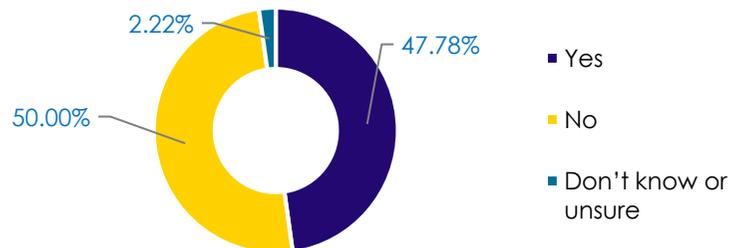
Q1a. Renovation work that involved knocking down either internal or external walls? (n=90)



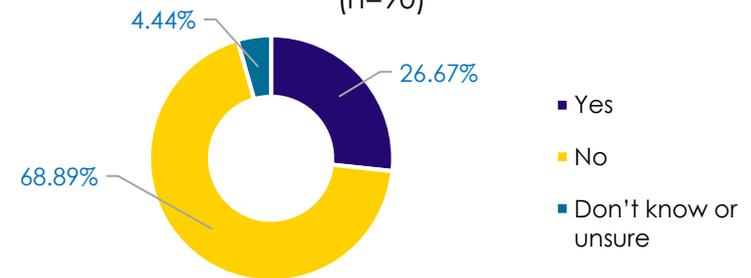
Q1c. A kitchen renovation, including the removal of existing fittings, fixtures, wall tiles / splashbacks and/or flooring? (n=90)



Q1b. A bathroom renovation, including the removal of existing fittings, fixtures, wall tiles / splashbacks and/or flooring? (n=90)



Q1d. Demolition of any external buildings (e.g. outhouses, sheds, fencing or other buildings)? (n=90)



Who did the work?

Just over three quarters (78%) of DIY home renovators did at least some of the work themselves.

27% did all the work themselves without involving professional trades, and over half (52%) did some with the assistance of friends or tradespeople.

Less than one quarter (22%) engaged trade professionals for the entire works.

I'm a dead man in 30+ years when the asbestos exposure finally kicks in after drilling multiple holes into asbestos eaves

I hold my breath when drilling into asbestos. D'oh!

Q2. If you answered Yes to any of the above, which of the following best describes how the work was undertaken? (n=60)



Assessment of risk of asbestos exposure

Was an assessment undertaken?

For the renovation on properties built between 1940 and 1990, just over half (56%) of the respondents reported that an assessment for risk of asbestos exposure was undertaken. Almost one third (32%) said that no assessment was undertaken. 12% did not know or were unsure.

Of the 56% who reported that an assessment had been undertaken, 58% had renovated kitchens, 68% bathrooms, 79% had knocked down either internal or external walls, and 45% had demolished external buildings.

Of those who renovated kitchens, 34% did not assess the planned work to see if there was risk of asbestos exposure, nor 28% of those who renovated bathrooms.



Q3. Prior to undertaking any of the work, was any assessment of the planned work undertaken to determine the risk of exposure to asbestos?

(n=68)

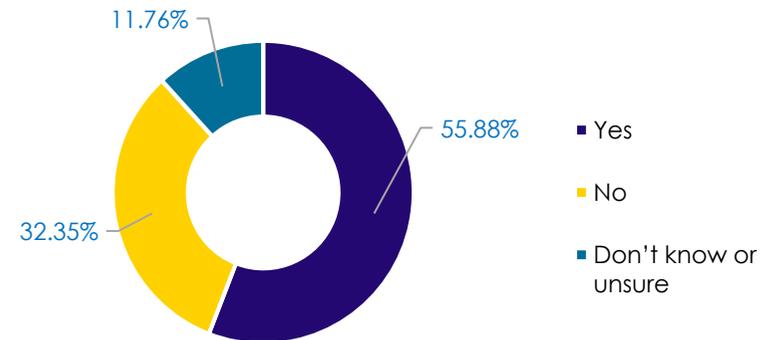
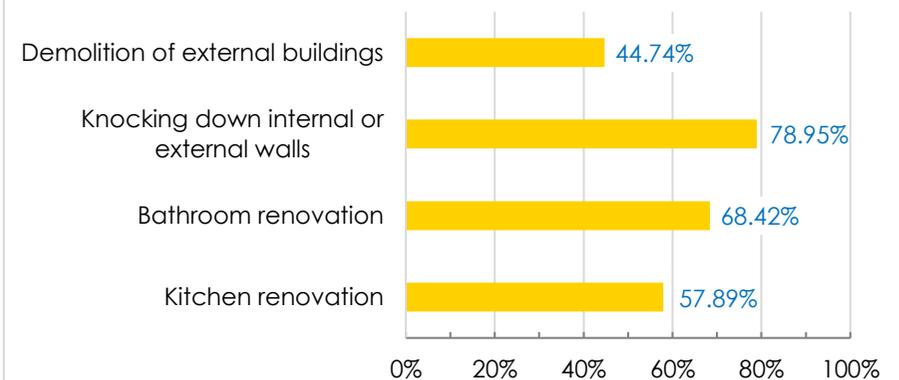


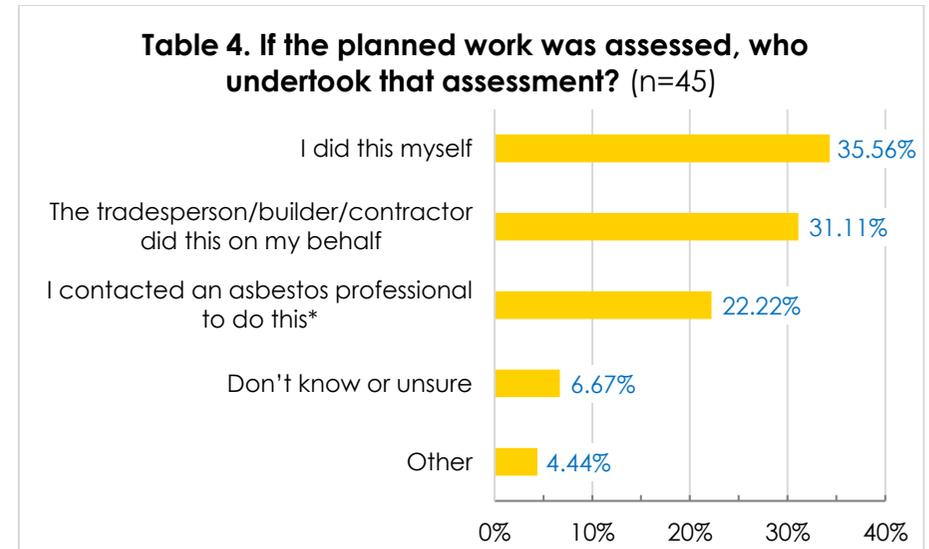
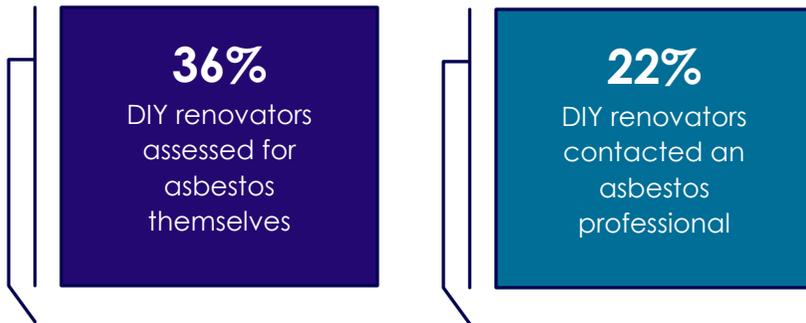
Table 3. Areas in which assessments were undertaken to determine the risk of exposure to asbestos. (n=38)



Who did the assessment?

By removing the results for the “not applicable” response in Table 4 (see Appendix A for the original Q4 data), over one-third (36%) did the assessment for risk of exposure to asbestos themselves. This is higher than the national results, which reported that 22% of DIY renovators undertook their own assessments.

31% reported that the tradesperson/builder/contractor did this on the respondents behalf and 22% engaged an asbestos professional to perform the assessment.



*(e.g. a licensed removalist or an occupational hygienist)

Removal of asbestos

Was removal of asbestos required?

Over half of respondents (55%) reported that asbestos did not need to be removed while 30% did remove asbestos containing materials (ACMs). 15% did not know or were unsure if asbestos removal had been undertaken.

Of the 22% who engaged an asbestos professional for the assessment (see Table 4), 80% subsequently engaged a licensed asbestos removalist to remove the ACMs.

Of the 36% who performed their own assessment, 31% went on to remove it themselves, and 19% engaged a licensed asbestos removalist.

Of the 31% who engaged a tradesperson/builder/contractor to perform the assessment, 29% subsequently engaged a licensed asbestos removalist, 21% were unsure who removed the asbestos, 14% reported that asbestos did not need to be removed, and 36% did not provide a response to the question.

Who removed the asbestos?

By removing the results for the “not applicable” response in Table 5, the data shows that exactly one-half (50%) engaged a licensed removalist. The original Q6 data can be found in Appendix A.

However, a significant percentage did the removal themselves (18.75%, slightly less than the national figure of 20%), and 22% did not know or were unsure how the asbestos was removed or disposed of. Only one person reported that the removal was done by a tradesperson on their behalf.

It should be noted that while 21 respondents stated that asbestos had to be removed at Q5, 32 respondents went on to answer Q6.

Q5. Did asbestos need to be removed as part of the renovation/construction or demolition process? (n=71)

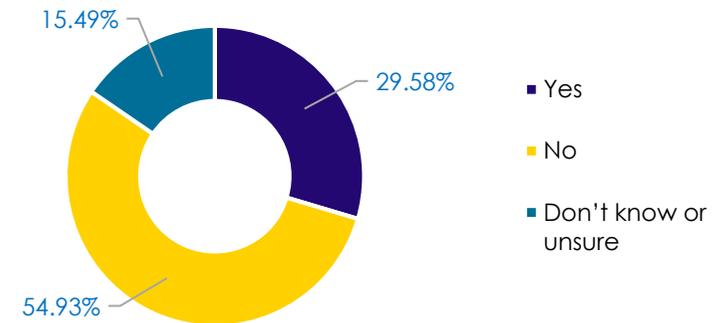
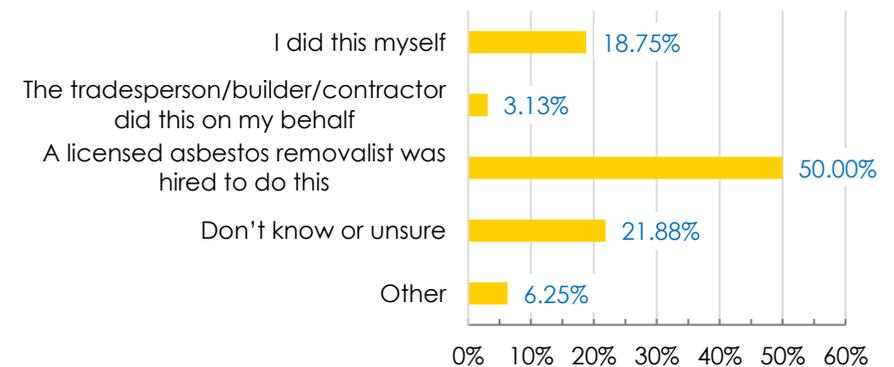


Table 5. Which of the following best describes how the asbestos was removed and disposed of? (n=32)

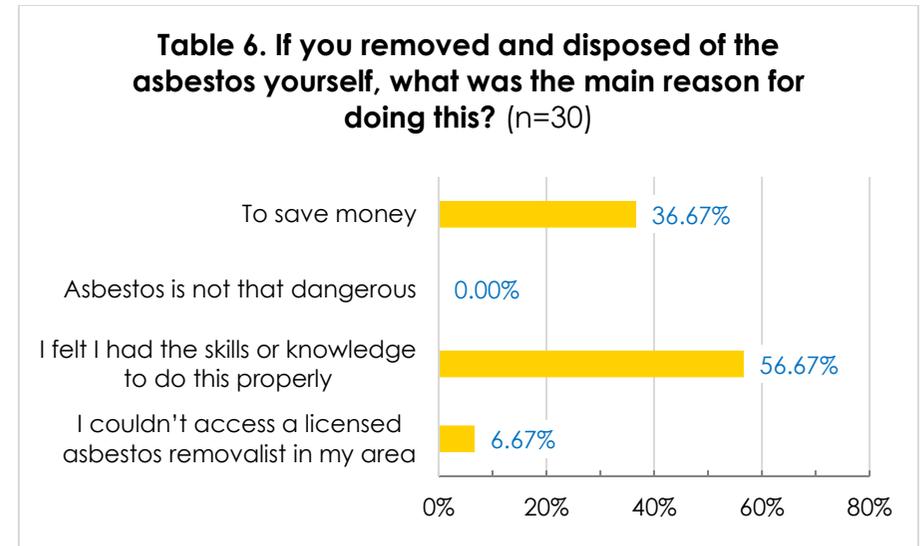


Why the DIY renovator removed the asbestos themselves

To enable proper analysis of the data in Q7, which required a response, the answers to questions “other” and “don’t know or unsure” have been removed from Table 6. The original Q7 table can be found in Appendix A.

The majority (57%) who removed ACMs themselves state that the reason is that they believe they have the skills/knowledge to do so. This is significantly higher than the national survey, which returned a result of 46%.

In the national survey, 39% respondents said they removed the asbestos themselves to save money, which is only slightly higher than 37% of Latrobe Valley respondents.



57%
DIY renovators believe they know how to remove asbestos themselves

37%
DIY renovators did it themselves to save money

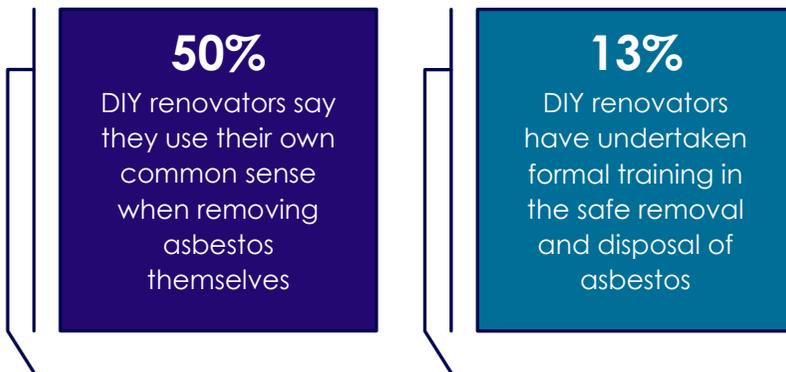
I am especially concerned that costs MUST be kept low or people here will not use a specialist removalist. I have heard of people burying asbestos in gardens etc rather than have to pay high costs.

As young adults with a mortgage... we don't have an extra \$400 for an inspection then getting potentially bullied into spending thousands on removal. We basically can't afford to ask. The reason we have an old 'pre - 1990 house is because it's cheaper.

DIY Renovators asbestos awareness level

All survey participants were required to answer Q.8 and these results can be seen in the Q8 chart at right.

However in order to understand the data in line with the preceding questions relating to identified asbestos removal already undertaken, in Table 7, only the responses have been included from those who identified in Q.5 that asbestos needed to be removed and who also reported in Q.6 that they did this removal themselves.



Q8. Which of the following best describes you?

(n=90)

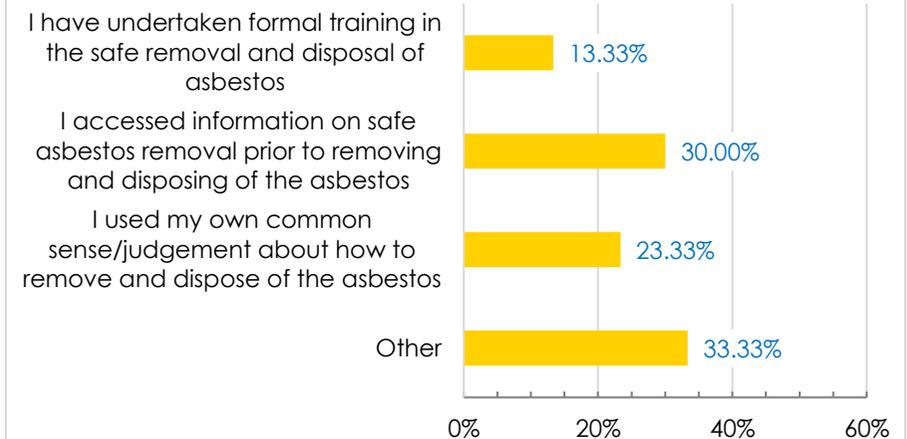
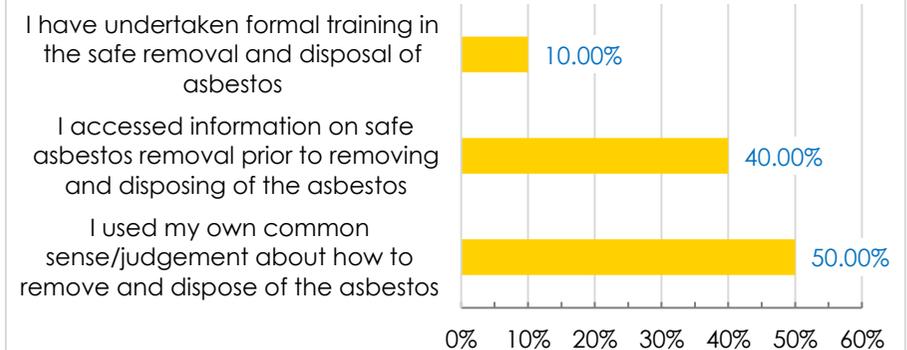


Table 7. How DIY renovators who said asbestos had to be removed (Q5) and who removed it themselves (Q6) describe themselves. (n=20)



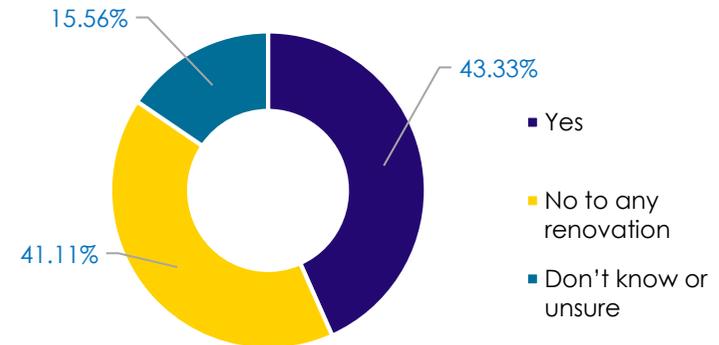
Future renovations

Two out of five (43%) DIY respondents reported that they were likely to do renovation work on properties built or renovated between 1940 – 1990 in the next 12 months.

One third (32%) intend to knock down internal walls, one quarter (24%) intend to work on a bathroom, one in five (21%) plan to work on a kitchen and one in five (19%) plan to be working on buildings such as outhouses and sheds or fencing.

Of those who intend to undertake renovations, 11% have had formal training, 28% have accessed information on safe asbestos removal prior to removal and disposal, and 33% reported to use their own common sense when it came to asbestos removal and disposal.

Table 8. DIY renovators undertaking renovation work on properties built between 1940 – 1990 in the next 12 months (n=90)



43%

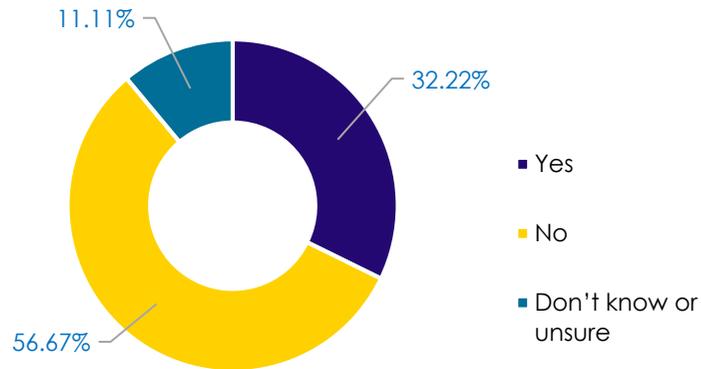
DIY renovators plan to undertake renovations in the next 12 months

33%

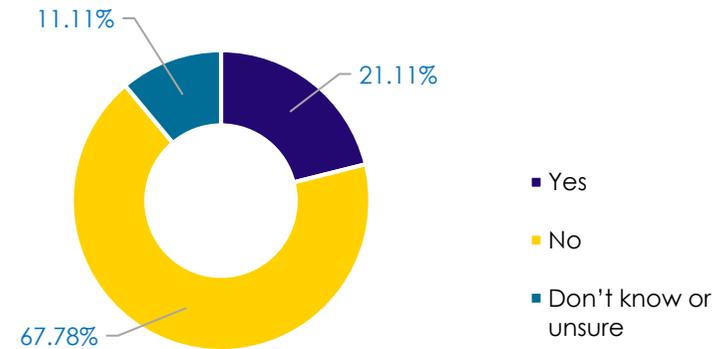
DIY renovators who plan to undertake renovations say they use their own common sense with regards to asbestos

Q9. Over the next 12 months, are you likely to undertake any of the following to a residence built or renovated between 1940 and 1990?

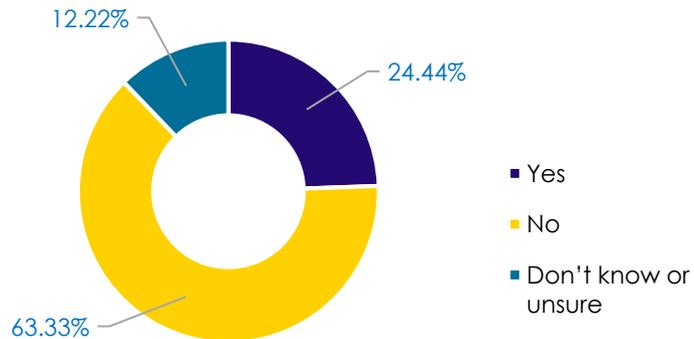
Q9a. Renovation work that involves knocking down either internal or external walls? (n=90)



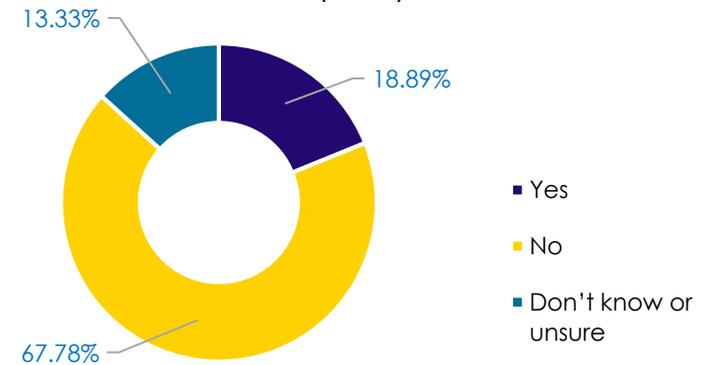
Q9c. A kitchen renovation, including the removal of existing fittings, fixtures, wall tiles/splashbacks and/or flooring? (n=90)



Q9b. A bathroom renovation, including the removal of existing fittings, fixtures, wall tiles/splashbacks and/or flooring? (n=90)



Q9d. Demolition of any external buildings (e.g. outhouses, sheds, fencing or other buildings)? (n=90)



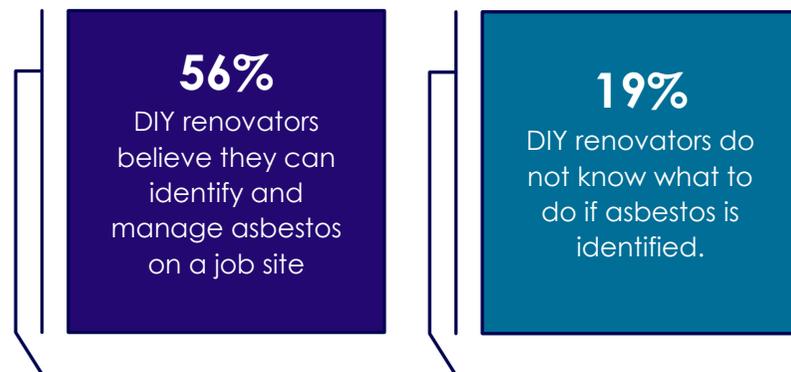
Attitudes towards asbestos

Over 95% respondents take asbestos and its dangers very seriously and 90% consider asbestos to be a key consideration when preparing to undertake a renovation.

However only 78% say that they know how to protect themselves from exposure to ACMs.

While 73% believe that they have enough information about asbestos to make informed decisions when doing renovations, one in five (19%) do not feel confident in this regard.

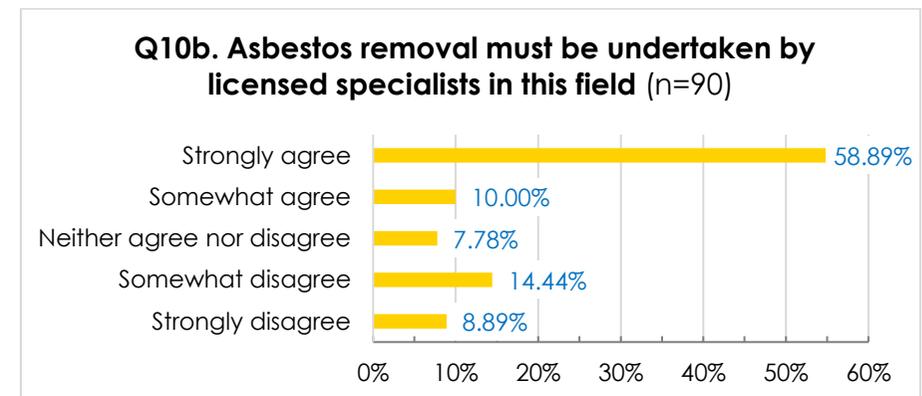
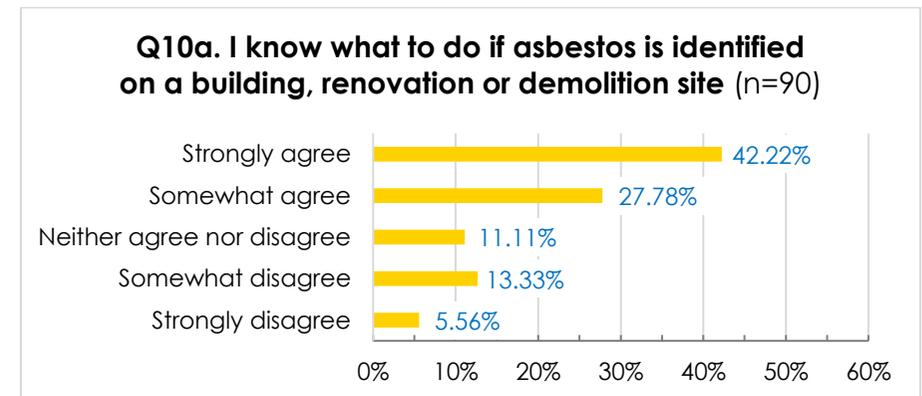
The responses reveal that the majority (69%) consider engaging a licensed professional to remove asbestos is the correct thing to do where asbestos is identified on their site. However, 19% report not knowing what to do if asbestos is identified.



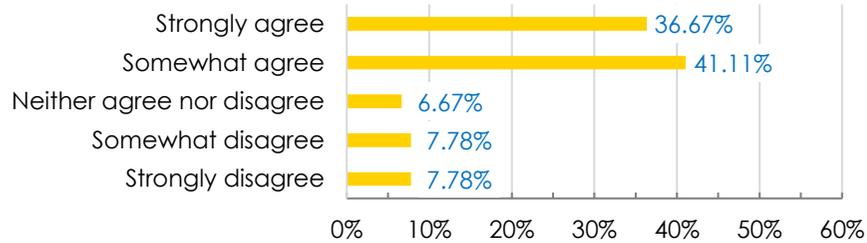
In regards to identifying and managing asbestos on a job site, over half (55%) of respondents believe they have sufficient knowledge to do this themselves.

Nearly three quarters (73%) of respondents remain concerned about potentially being exposed to asbestos.

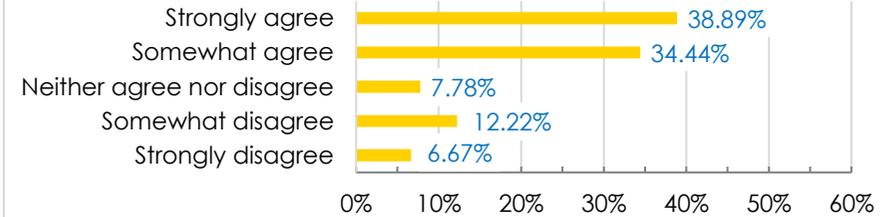
Q.10 Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:



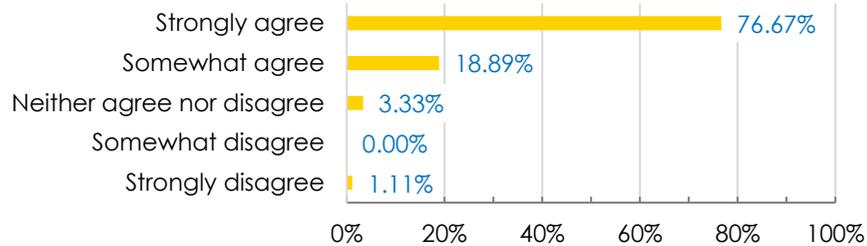
Q10c. I know how to protect myself from exposure to asbestos (n=90)



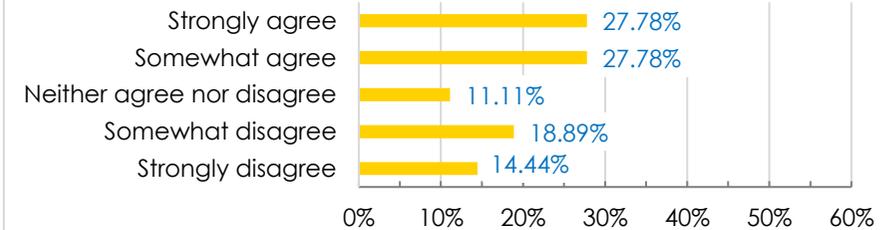
Q10f. I have enough information about asbestos to make informed decisions when doing any renovation work (n=90)



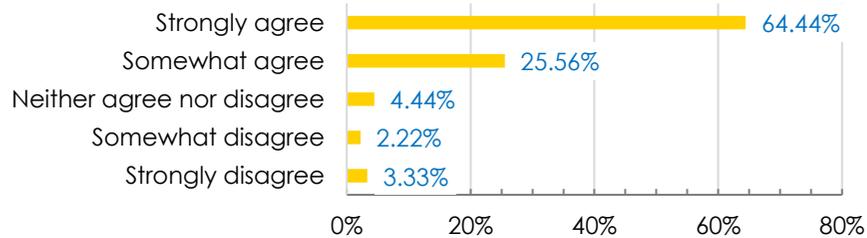
Q10d. I take asbestos and its dangers very seriously (n=90)



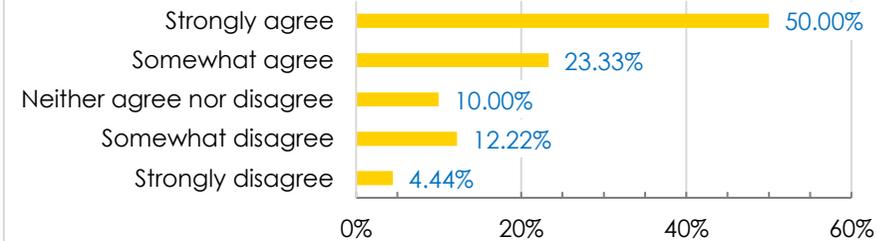
Q10g. I have sufficient knowledge about how to identify and manage asbestos on the job site (n=90)



Q10e. When preparing for any renovation project, asbestos is a key consideration (n=90)



Q10h. I am concerned about potentially being exposed to asbestos (n=90)



Further comments from the DIY renovators section

Compliance/Enforcement:

- “ “ Please tighten both the asbestos removal/monitoring of such product regulations & consequences for non-compliance.
- “ “ Government investigators to weed out shonky business and illegal dumping of asbestos products.

Awareness/education:

- “ “ ...if all councils had an asbestos ID service that could help...
- “ “ I know how to protect myself from exposure to asbestos, "only if it can be identified!!!"
- “ “ I didn't have a lot of education about this as a kid, it's only been in the last few years I've gained some knowledge mainly through my partner doing training at his work and research.

Costs of removal:

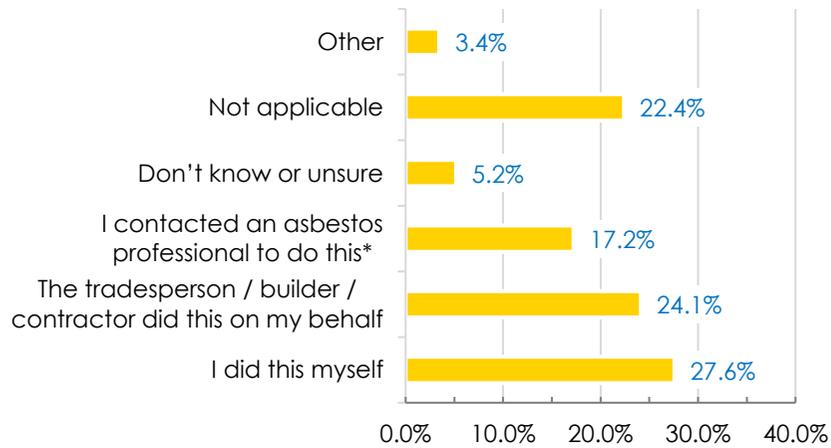
- “ “ If removal was less expensive, maybe a subsidy available and low cost inspections if you are not sure if Asbestos is present, this may help stop people from cutting corners and removing and dumping it themselves. Over the long term this could save millions associated in Health Care costs.
- “ “ Make it easier for people to get professional advice if need be at no cost - help them deal with it at minimum or no cost so that no risk is exposed to everyone because of fear of having to deal with it.

Personal experience:

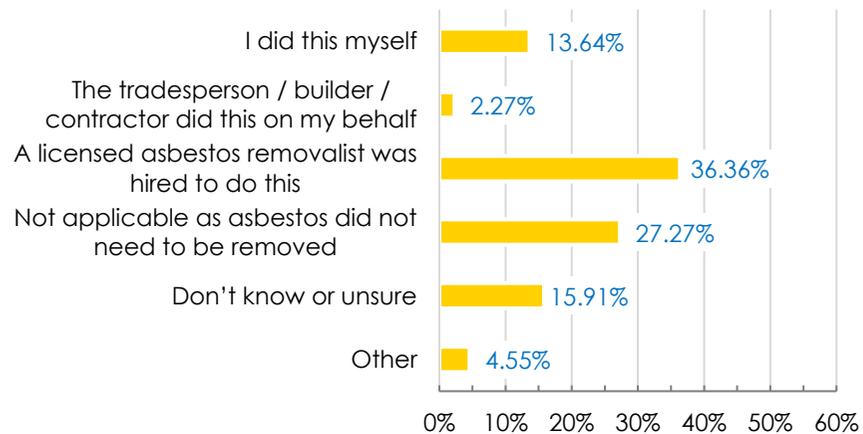
- “ “ ...unfortunately we here in the Latrobe Valley have been exposed to it most of our lives in our work places and our homes. I have seen many many friends slowly die including my father and uncle from asbestos related lung diseases. Most of the valley workforce in the SEC and APM would have been affected to some degree...
- “ “ I am concerned about being exposed to asbestos when working within the Briquetting and Power Industry.
- “ “ There seems to be a lot of asbestos material in the Latrobe Valley, so there is always potential for exposure.

Appendix A

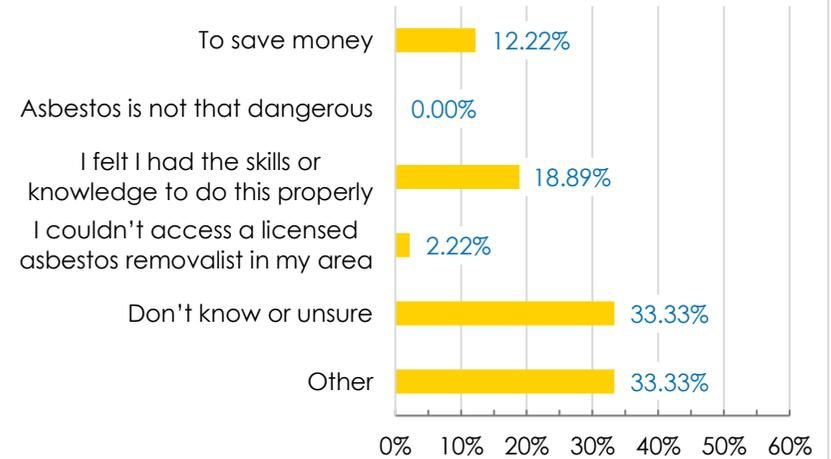
Q4. If the planned work was assessed, who undertook that assessment? (n=58)



Q6. Which of the following best describes how the asbestos was removed and disposed of? (n=44)



Q7. If you removed and disposed of the asbestos yourself, what was the main reason for doing this? (n=90)



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