



28 July 2016

Guy Barnett, Minister for Building and Construction

WorkSafe finds illness cluster claims false

A WorkSafe Tasmania investigation into mould detected at the Royal Hobart Hospital (RHH) redevelopment site has found a claimed illness cluster “did not exist”.

The investigation was requested by my predecessor, the then Minister Adam Brooks, following an email received at the generic WorkSafe address from an officer of the Communications, Electrical and Plumbing Union on 22 April.

Subsequently, on 26 April, the Opposition Leader alleged in Parliament that an illness cluster had been identified among construction workers. That same day, the Shadow Health Minister issued a media release with the heading: “Sick workers sent home after illness cluster exposed at Royal redevelopment.”\*

The extensive WorkSafe investigation involved authorised inspectors obtaining copies of a range of reports, including those from subject matter experts, as well as engaging with and interviewing a total of 90 workers and conducting site visits.

This week, I have received a letter from the chief executive of WorkSafe Tasmania providing advice on the outcomes of the investigation and, in the interests of transparency, will release this correspondence.^

In summary, WorkSafe found:

no breach of the duty owed by a person conducting a business or undertaking as required under the Work Health and Safety Act;

both the Project Engineer and Project Safety Manager confirmed that the principal contractor had no information (including hazard identification and injury notifications) relating to the health of persons on their worksite as having been affected by mould; and

no evidence of a cluster of illness resulting from the mould contamination.

It is noted that a query by the principal contractor of the absence of a single employee with flu-like symptoms resulted in WorkSafe confirming with the worker that their symptoms could not be attributed to the mould.

Given the intended use of the redevelopment site, I am informed the principal contractor partners are taking a particularly cautious approach to mould remediation.

WorkSafe found that, upon detection of the mould, relevant and appropriate containment and remediation measures were implemented.

Further, WorkSafe is satisfied the principal contractor is appropriately managing health and safety risks within the RHH work environment, and will continue to monitor remediation works, with regular workplace assessments by both inspectors and independent occupational hygienists.

\* Hansard, House of Assembly, Tuesday 26 April 2016 and <http://taslabor.com/sick-workers-sent-home-illness-cluster-exposed-royal-redevelopment/>