

Slater & Gordon



Asbestos Research Trust

NEWSLETTER

JUNE 2004

Peter Garrett launches asbestos fund

At the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney, Labor's new recruit Peter Garrett recently launched the Slater & Gordon Asbestos Research Trust.

The fund, believed to be the largest single charitable undertaking by any law firm in Australia,

has set out on the ambitious task of funding doctors and scientists to find a cure for the dreadful diseases caused by asbestos.

Mr Garrett, whose classic "Blue Sky Mine" song immortalised the plight of Wittenoom



Peter Garrett launches the Trust.

workers, welcomed the creation of the Trust.

He stressed the importance of the dual aspects of the trust; funding not only research into a cure for asbestos disease, but also training doctors and other medical professionals in better methods

of treating and providing palliative care for sufferers of asbestos disease.

Mr Garrett was introduced by Slater & Gordon senior partner Peter Gordon, who said that the firm had committed a minimum of \$500,000 to the

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““ The Slater & Gordon Asbestos Research Trust is a not-for-profit research and educational trust established to fund and support the battle against asbestos. ””



NEWSLETTER

Professor Bill Musk accepts the \$50,000 grant from Robert Vojakovic, president of the Asbestos Diseases Society of Australia.



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Peter Garrett launches asbestos fund

Trust over the next five years.

Mr Gordon said: "As a firm, we have seen at first hand the suffering of asbestos disease victims and their families. We have observed the pain and the family dislocation mesothelioma can cause.

"We have been very successful getting compensation for people with asbestos-related disease over the past twenty years, but compensation can only do so much.

"We desperately

need a cure and in the meantime, we need continuous improvement to the treatments available to minimise pain and distress.

"The Trust has been specifically designed with these purposes in mind."

The first recipient of an award from the Trust was Professor Bill Musk of the Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital in Perth. Professor Musk received \$50,000 to fund an on-going epidemiological study of people exposed to asbestos at Wittenoom, information which forms the backbone of much of the other research going on

“... not just scientists but doctors, nurses and social workers involved in the day-to day care of asbestos disease sufferers, making use of the funding ...”

into asbestos disease in Australia today.

Professor Musk said that the grant was critical to the continuation of his research.

Mr Gordon said he hoped that the Trust would make a vibrant and dynamic contribution to the treatment of asbestos disease in Australia over the next decade.

"We want to see not just scientists but doctors, nurses and social workers

involved in the day-to day care of asbestos disease sufferers, making use of the funding available from the Trust to further their experience and qualifications.

"We also plan to let our clients know of the Trust. We know of many clients who, when they have received their damages awards, have wanted to make a contribution to this sort of foundation."

According to the Commonwealth Government's National Occupational Health and Safety Commission, the incidence of the terminal cancer mesothelioma – caused by exposure to asbestos – has been increasing since 1965 with no indication when it will decline.

Australia has the highest incidence of mesothelioma in the world.

Since 1980, 33,000 Australians have died from asbestos-related disease, including 8000 from mesothelioma and 25,000 from lung cancer, other cancers, and asbestosis.

These figures may be conservative:

- some deaths are misdiagnosed as due to smoking and other causes
- some deaths are not reported to the Australian Mesothelioma Register for privacy reasons
- some jurisdictions (according to NOHSC) such as SA, Victoria and NSW under-report cancers



The awards

An annual research award of the Australian Lung Foundation.

The Trust will fund this \$30,000 award to recognise achievement and support the advance of medical research in asbestos-related disease.

The recipient of the award will be determined by the Thoracic Society of Australia and New Zealand, and will be presented at its annual scientific meeting.

The Vojakovic Fellowship.

The Fellowship is named in honour of Robert and Rose Marie Vojakovic who, through the Asbestos Diseases Society of Australia, have each worked tirelessly for the victims of asbestos-related disease.

The Fellowship will be awarded to medical and allied health professionals to support their continuing education in the prevention,

treatment and palliation of asbestos-related disease.

The Fellowship may be awarded throughout the financial year to any number of applicants providing the total amount awarded does not exceed \$30,000 in any one financial year.

Applications shall be reviewed upon receipt and Fellowships awarded throughout the year.



Peter Gordon, senior partner of law firm Slater & Gordon, has fought many legal battles for victims of asbestos.

Slater & Gordon



Asbestos Research Trust

The Slater & Gordon Asbestos Research Trust is a not-for-profit research and educational trust established to fund and support:

1. Medical research into asbestos-related disease, particularly mesothelioma;
2. The sharing of information amongst health professionals with respect to the prevention, treatment and palliation of asbestos-related disease.

The Trust will operate under the auspice of the Melbourne Community Foundation. The Melbourne Community Foundation is a not-for-profit foundation that acts as a host organisation for trusts created for philanthropic purposes.

Slater & Gordon will commit a minimum of \$500,000 to the Trust over 5 years.

The first act of the Trust is to donate to Professor A W (Bill) Musk \$50,000 to further his research into the health consequences of Wittenoom.



A growing awareness

Launching the Slater & Gordon Asbestos Research Trust, Peter Garrett has commended its establishment and wished it every success.

The asbestos toll of illness and death demands a better response, he said, and, while governments provide some money, more is needed for research and advocacy.

Mr Garrett was until recently President of the Australian Conservation Foundation and a former member of the Australian group Midnight Oil whose 1990 hit "Blue Sky Mine" drew public attention to the plight of miners at CSR's Wittenoom asbestos mine in north-west Western Australia.

Peter Garrett is widely known as a passionate

advocate and essayist on a range of contemporary Australian and global issues and "Blue Sky Mine" was the band's response to the asbestos issue after a band member read the Ben Hills book "Blue Murder".

Mr Garrett is expected to enter Federal Parliament at the next election as the member for the Sydney seat of Kingsford-Smith.

He told the launch how he had heard of asbestos and fibro but was previously unaware of their deadly effects through lung cancer, mesothelioma and asbestosis.

Like many Australians he had not realised how many Australians had died because of asbestos, and how the death toll will continue to rise for many years.

"These are damning

statistics, even more alarming when you consider asbestos was only banned from the workplace from the start of this year, Mr Garrett said.

"It is tragic because it is such a deadly and speedy range of diseases that people face.

"It is tragic because of the obdurate resistance by those responsible to be held accountable.

"And the most telling and probably despicable example of that being the flight recently of James Hardie to the Netherlands, leaving inadequate funds to compensate those to whom it sold a product it knew to be deadly."



The launch of the Trust, March 24 2004, at Sydney's Powerhouse Museum. At the lectern is Peter Garrett, with Professor Bill Musk (left) and Peter Gordon.

If you are a doctor or allied health professional working in the care of asbestos disease sufferers, or studying the diseases, you should keep the Slater & Gordon Asbestos Research Trust in mind. The Trust may be able to assist you with further education, conference participation or other forms of support connected with your work.

Contact us

You can contact the Slater & Gordon Asbestos Research Trust by phoning Kerri O'Toole on (03) 9602 6871, emailing kotoole@slatergordon.com.au or by writing c/o Slater & Gordon, GPO Box 4864 V V, Melbourne 3001.

You can also visit www.asbestosresearchtrust.com.au which has further details of the Trust and application forms.