

18 October 2024

Yasir Shaikh
Via email

Email: fyi-request-28460-1b38bd31@requests.fyi.org.nz

Dear Yasir

REQUEST FOR INFORMATION UNDER THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL INFORMATION AND MEETINGS ACT 1987 (LGOIMA) – ASBESTOS CEMENT PIPES IN AUCKLAND'S DRINKING WATER INFRASTRUCTURE

Your request

On 20 September 2024, we received your request for information. In particular, your request was as follows:

Dear Watercare Services Limited,

Subject: Official Information Request Regarding Asbestos Cement Pipes in Auckland's Drinking Water Infrastructure

I am writing to request information under the Official Information Act 1982 regarding the use of asbestos cement pipes in Auckland's drinking water supply system. Specifically, I request the following information:

1. The total length and number of pipes in Auckland's drinking water infrastructure that are made from asbestos cement, including an indication of how many of these pipes were installed between the 1950s and the 1980s.

2. The total length and number of pipes in Auckland's Glenfield drinking water infrastructure that are made from asbestos cement, including an indication of how many of these pipes were installed between the 1950s and the 1980s.

2. Any plans or programs in place to replace or monitor these asbestos cement pipes, including timelines for their replacement and any assessments of their current condition.

3. Information on the health impacts of asbestos cement pipes being used in drinking water systems, particularly whether there is any evidence or research indicating potential risks to public health for populations consuming water that flows through these pipes.

I would appreciate receiving this information in electronic form if possible. If any part of my request is unclear or requires further detail, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you for your attention to this request. I look forward to your response within the statutory timeframe as outlined in the Official Information Act.

Kind regards,

Yours faithfully,

Yasir Shaikh

Our response

We provide our response below in the order of your email.

- 1. The total length and number of pipes in Auckland's drinking water infrastructure that are made from asbestos cement, including an indication of how many of these pipes were installed between the 1950s and the 1980s.***

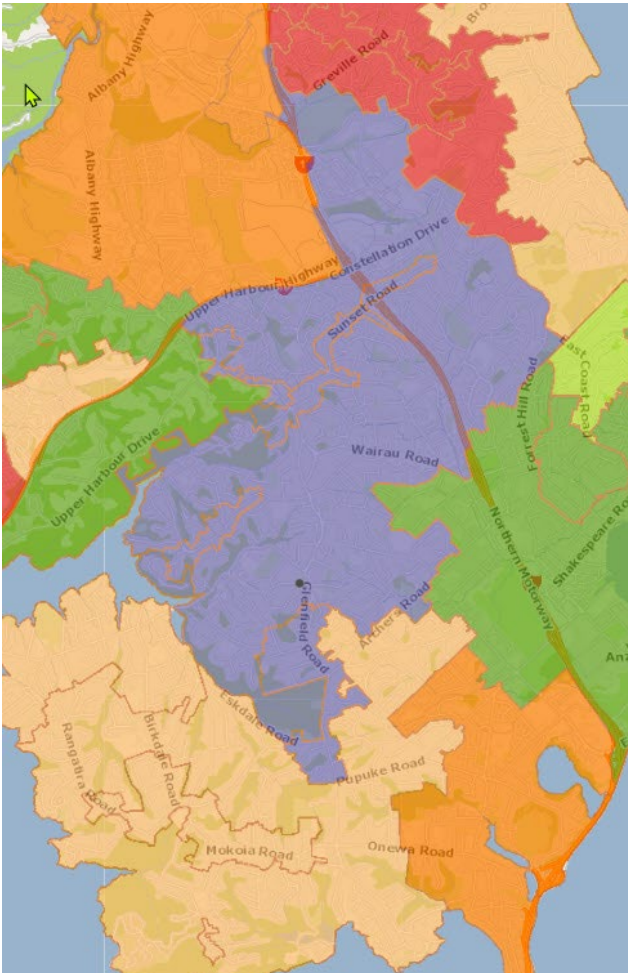
The drinking water network constitutes thousands of pipe segments between valves, and other network branches that connect these segments together. Many of the historic records that Watercare holds were digitised from original paper maps, and they do not provide detail of the number of "pipes" as they were originally installed.

Total length of local network pipes (as at 30 June 2024) that are made from asbestos cement = 2,732 km

Total length of local network pipes (installed 1 January 1950 – 31 December 1989) that are made from asbestos cement = 2,596 km

2. The total length and number of pipes in Auckland's Glenfield drinking water infrastructure that are made from asbestos cement, including an indication of how many of these pipes were installed between the 1950s and the 1980s.

Please note that Watercare does not hold official suburb boundaries in our GIS data. Therefore, we have used the Glenfield water supply zone extent as a basis for this query. The extent of this zone is denoted by the purple area shown below:



Total length of local network pipes in Glenfield water zone (installed 1 January 1950 – 31 December 1989) that are made from asbestos cement = 92 km.

Since the 1990s, pipes made from asbestos cement have not been installed in Glenfield water zone.

3. Any plans or programs in place to replace or monitor these asbestos cement pipes, including timelines for their replacement and any assessments of their current condition.

In line with best practice asset management approaches, Watercare has developed proactive methodology to identify pipelines where our level of service provision could be compromised by potential leakage or bursts. This methodology integrates the hydraulic performance with a materials (structural / deterioration) approach, as well as a criticality (consequence of failure) factor and this will help us monitor, optimise, renew, and improve the performance of the network. Our renewal programme includes more than \$480 million to rehabilitate and replace pipelines over 10 years, and we expect Asbestos Cement pipelines across the region to be a prominent component of this programme.

4. Information on the health impacts of asbestos cement pipes being used in drinking water systems, particularly whether there is any evidence or research indicating potential risks to public health for populations consuming water that flows through these pipes.

Asbestos-cement pipes were commonly used around the world – including in Auckland – for the construction of water pipes over several decades. Importantly, the asbestos was used simply to add strength within a cement matrix. While asbestos fibres can be harmful when inhaled, extensive studies have found there is no danger to your health from ingesting asbestos fibres in drinking water. When asbestos is inhaled, only airborne fibres longer than 10 microns (μm) are hazardous. Asbestos fibres of this size are generally not present in water contained in asbestos pipes.

Neither the World Health Organisation nor Taumata Arowai (New Zealand's drinking water regulator) have set guideline levels for asbestos in drinking water. For this reason, New Zealand drinking water supplies are not routinely tested for asbestos.

Future options

You have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman of this decision. Information about how to make a complaint is available at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or freephone 0800 802 602.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Priyan Perera', with a large, stylized flourish above the name.

Priyan Perera
Chief Strategy and Planning Officer