

Council Policy – Wittenoom and Yampire Asbestos Management Areas

Responsible Directorate	Office of the Chief Executive Officer
Responsible Business Unit/s	Office of the Chief Executive Officer
Responsible Officer	Chief Executive Officer
Affected Business Unit/s	All

Objective

The objectives of this policy are to:

- (a) provide information concerning the continued presence of blue asbestos fibres within the Wittenoom and Yampire Asbestos Management Areas (AMA) and its designation as a contaminated site;
- (b) provide a further warning concerning the ongoing and serious health hazards associated with exposure to asbestos fibres present on land within the AMA;
- (c) discourage people from entering the AMA for any reason; and
- (d) indicate the Shire's position with respect to a number of matters concerning the AMA.

Scope


This policy is concerned with the AMA, which is shown on the plan attached as Annexure 1 to this policy.

This policy replaces Policy FIN10: Wittenoom Townsite, Wittenoom Gorge and Yampire Gorge Rates and Services.

Background

The AMA comprise 46,840 hectares and includes the former Wittenoom townsite, Wittenoom airfield, Wittenoom, Colonial, Yampire, Western and Eastern Gorges and the Joffe Creek floodplain between the former Wittenoom townsite and the Fortescue River.

In 2008, land within the AMA was classified as a contaminated site, under the *Contaminated Sites Act 2003*. This classification was made because of the known presence of free asbestos fibre contamination within the AMA.



Asbestos was mined from the gorges mentioned earlier and processed in mills within the AMA from 1937 to 1966. These activities produced waste material called 'tailings' which contain varying amounts of blue asbestos fibres (crocidolite). These tailings were stored within tailings dumps located in the gorges.

The tailings dumps have been the subject of wind and water erosion which has spread blue asbestos fibres over a large area both within the gorges and downstream across the floodplain.

In addition, tailings from the tailings dumps were used for the construction and maintenance of roads, the airfield and building materials used in the development of the former Wittenoom townsite.

Consequently, free blue asbestos fibres are present throughout the AMA.

In addition to being carried by wind and water, blue asbestos fibres can be disturbed by human activities such as walking and driving vehicles through land within the AMA.

It took many years for the health hazards of environmental exposure to blue asbestos fibres to be fully understood. It is now known that exposure to blue asbestos fibres (in particular inhalation of these fibres) can cause serious disease in the form of mesothelioma, asbestosis and lung cancer. Mesothelioma and lung cancer can develop after even a brief exposure to blue asbestos fibres and may not appear for many years following exposure.

Tragically, there have been many deaths of former asbestos mine and mill workers as well as residents and visitors who were exposed to blue asbestos fibres within the former Wittenoom townsite or other locations within the AMA.

As a consequence of the widespread presence of blue asbestos fibres within the AMA and the high risk to human health posed by these fibres, it is not safe for people to enter the AMA, even for brief periods. The former Wittenoom townsite is now uninhabited following the eviction of the last remaining resident in 2022.

Measures have been taken by the Shire and State government over many years in response to the serious health risks of exposure to asbestos fibres within the AMA. Recent measures include:

- (a) the enactment of the *Wittenoom Closure Act 2022* by the Western Australian Parliament to facilitate the final closure of the former townsite of Wittenoom; and
- (b) the State government's compulsory acquisition of the remainder of the privately owned properties within the former Wittenoom townsite and the removal of all structures from these properties.

Policy Statement

Health risks of exposure to asbestos fibres within the AMA

The Shire warns the general public that exposure to blue asbestos fibres is highly likely if people enter any land within the AMA, even for brief periods, and that exposure to these fibres poses a high risk to human health.

No services or facilities within AMA

The Shire will not provide any services or facilities within the AMA.

No tourists or other visitors within AMA

The Shire will not promote or endorse and will discourage entry into AMA by tourists or other visitors and will work with the State government to eliminate tourism within the AMA.

No occupation of land within AMA

Land within the AMA is not suitable for any human occupation or land use. Consequently, the Shire will not support or approve the occupation, development or use of any land within the AMA on a permanent or temporary basis.

Definitions

Nil

Relevant policies/documents

Nil

Relevant legislation/local laws

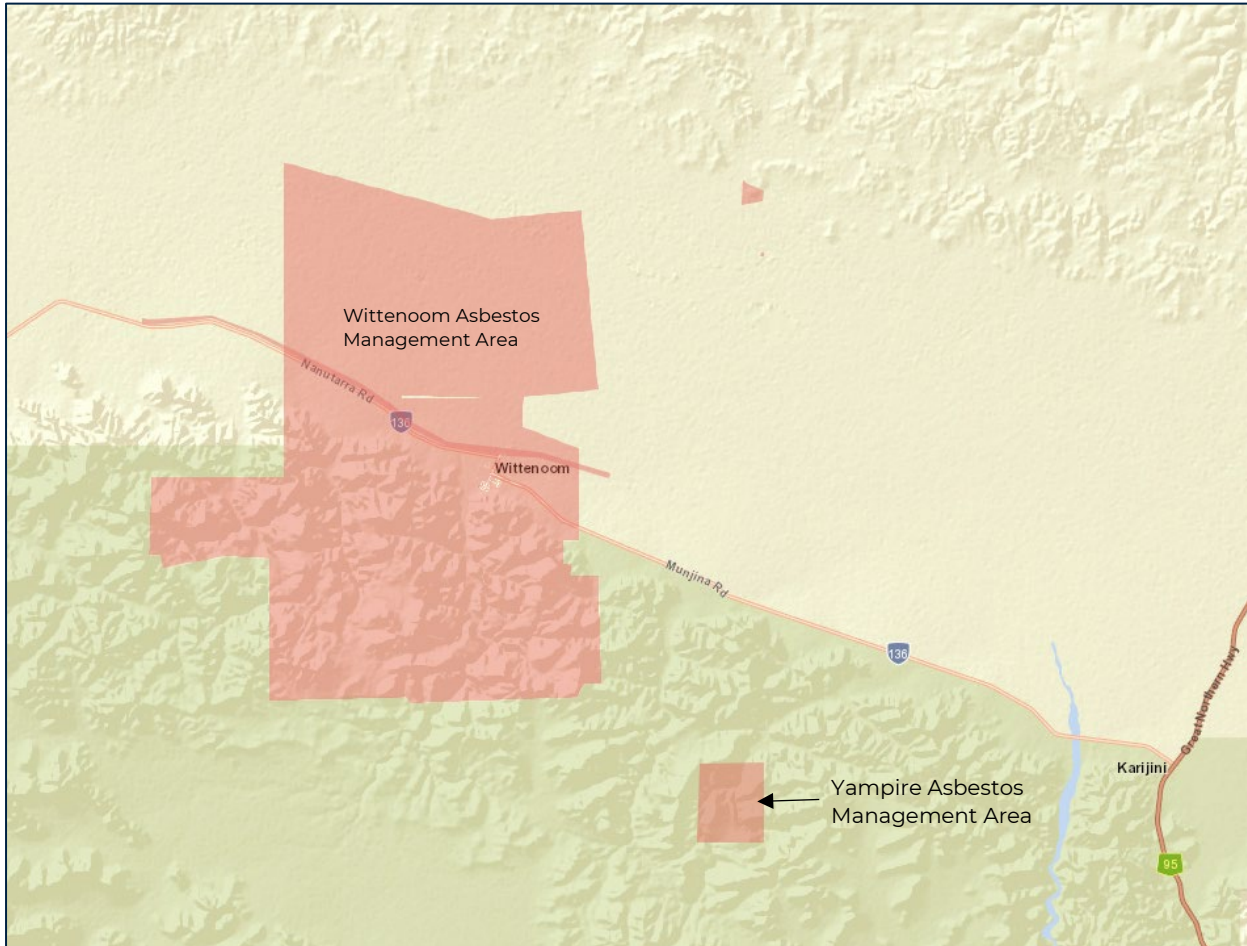
Contaminated Sites Act 2003

Wittenoom Closure Act 2022

Office use only				
Relevant delegations	Nil			
Council adoption	Date	9 May 2023	Resolution #	074/2023
Reviewed/modified	Date		Resolution #	
Next review due	Date	2025	Resolution #	

Annexure 1

Wittenoom and Yampire Asbestos Management Areas (AMA)



Source: Department of Water and Environmental Regulation – Contaminated Sites Database