



Wittenoom

Information on the former town of Wittenoom

The "closing down" of Wittenoom

Mining in Wittenoom ceased in 1966. In 1978, the State Government began phasing down the townsite and encouraging residents to relocate because of concerns over health risks from the presence of airborne asbestos fibres.

Between 1986 and 1992 houses and buildings were demolished and the school, nursing post and police station were closed, with alternative services being provided primarily from Tom Price. In 1993, the airport was officially closed.

In December 2006, the Government of Western Australia removed the town's official status and shut off the power grid. In June 2007 the townsite was officially degazetted and the town's name was removed from official maps and road signs.

As a result of verified environmental reports, the town was declared a contaminated site in 2008 under the Contaminated Sites Act (2003).

The Department of Lands is leading a State Government project team that has taken responsibility for addressing the human health risks posed by the asbestos contamination.

Alternative attractions

There are many beautiful destinations in the Pilbara to visit including:

Karijini National Park

Karijini National Park is one of Western Australia's largest national parks and arguably one of the most spectacular. Unbeatable for adventure, the park is famous for its sheer gorges, waterfalls and cool swimming holes.

Tom Price

Nestled deep in the Hamersley Ranges, at the base of the beautiful Mt Nameless, is the town of Tom Price. Tom Price is a picturesque, modern and fully serviced town designed to blend into the natural environment and is a great destination during the sunny winter months.

Nullagine & Marble Bar

With the discovery of gold in 1888, and later diamond and gem stones, Nullagine is unspoilt nature and is a must for the traveller seeking true four wheel adventure and off the beaten track wilderness. Stop in Marble Bar to visit the historic gold rush mining town and the Comet Mine.

For land information:

Department of Lands
Contaminated Sites Branch

www.lands.wa.gov.au
Wittenoom@lands.wa.gov.au
Phone: (08) 6552 4400

For health information:

Department of Health
Environmental Health
Directorate

www.health.wa.gov.au
Phone: (08) 9388 4999





Contaminated area:

The entire area below was officially declared a contaminated site in 2008 by the Department of Environment and Conservation under the Contaminated Sites Act (2003).

Exposure to asbestos can cause the development of asbestosis, mesothelioma and lung cancer.

Diseases associated with Asbestos

Asbestosis is a scarring of the lung as a result of asbestos exposure. The lung scarring may cause shortness of breath and varies in severity. Smoking doesn't cause asbestosis but it will make the disease worse.

Mesothelioma is a cancer which occurs in the thin lining (called the mesothelium) between the chest wall and the lungs and heart; and between the stomach and intestines.

Lung cancers are cancers which begin in lung tissue. Smoking is the main cause of lung cancers, but they are also caused by asbestos. Smoking and asbestos exposure combined increase the risk of lung cancers.

Mesothelioma and lung cancer can develop after even brief exposure to asbestos. The time between the exposure to the asbestos and the occurrence of the cancer can be 20 to 50 years after exposure, or even longer.

The former town of Wittenoom is within the largest contaminated site in the Southern Hemisphere.

Asbestos in Wittenoom

Asbestos remnants from past mining operations in Wittenoom have already resulted in thousands of fatalities among miners, residents and visitors to the town.

Asbestos (a naturally occurring mineral) was once considered valuable, and was used in building materials, paper and textile products and friction products such as brake linings for vehicles.

It has since been discovered that inhaling asbestos fibres poses a high risk of contracting fatal diseases such as mesothelioma, asbestosis and lung cancer.

Blue asbestos (crocidolite), the type once mined in Wittenoom, is the most deadly of all types of asbestos. Remnants of blue asbestos mining are still present in Wittenoom.

The asbestos fibres are carried by wind and water, and can be disturbed by human activities such as walking or driving through the area.

The State Government strongly advises against ALL travel through Wittenoom and the surrounding areas.

