



Asbestos in Mulch in NSW February 2024

Statement Issued on 20 February 2024

The Australian Organics Recycling Association (AORA) understands the concerns regarding the recent incidents surrounding the detection of asbestos in mulch products in public spaces across NSW, following the finding of asbestos by the NSW EPA and the City of Sydney at various sites. As the peak industry body for the organics recycling industry we are alarmed with the growing number of sites affected and the impact this is having on the industry as a whole and confidence in recycled organics products.

AORA understands that the NSW EPA's investigation was triggered in January after bonded asbestos was identified in recycled coarse mulch at the Rozelle Parklands, resulting in the closure of the park just weeks after it opened.

AORA applauds the swift action of the NSW EPA undertaking wide investigations into the recycled mulch supply chain and understands that investigations are continuing. Protecting the safety of the community and minimising the potential risk of harm to human health is paramount.

When considering the potential risk of asbestos contamination, it is important for the community to recognise at the outset that mulch products are different to compost products.

Mulch products consist of plant material that has been *shredded or screened* to a preferred particle size or grading. They are generally used for long-term weed suppression and soil protection.

Under the [NSW Mulch Order 2016](#), mulch products may include material from urban wood residues such as off-cuts, saw dust, wood shavings, packaging crates and pallets, and forestry residues. This means that mulch products can be produced by various processing facilities including sawmills, waste and recycling facilities, arborists and landscaping businesses.

Both the [NSW Mulch Order 2016](#) and the [NSW Compost Order 2016](#) stipulate that before supplying a product, processors must ensure it does not contain asbestos.

Members of the Australian Organics Recycling Association have been manufacturing and supplying high quality products in large volumes for decades.

The recycled organics industry remains committed to producing high-quality and high-performing compost and mulch products that are safe for application to land and to human health. Maintaining high product quality and regulatory compliance are key to protecting the livelihood of the recycling organics industry. AORA supports compliance action being taken against organisations that are shown to do the wrong thing.

AORA has actively advocated for consistent policy and regulatory settings that promote the delivery of clean, source separated organic feedstock without plastics, chemicals and other contaminants to organics recycling facilities. AORA continues to advocate for the elimination of hazardous materials and contaminants from all feedstock streams, noting that this is one of the most significant threats to the future success of recycling and the circular economy.

AORA promotes quality assurance as a whole of value chain responsibility – from feedstock receipt, processing, transportation through to application of materials for end use. Through this approach, potential risk to human health and the environment is minimised and quality products prevail.

AORA will continue to monitor this situation and will provide further updates as more information becomes available.