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CSR must make clear intentions on asbestos liabilities

Sugar and building products giant CSR Ltd must publicly declare it will fully fund and pay all asbestos compensation liabilities following the announcement of plans to break-up the company, Peter Gordon, senior partner of Slater & Gordon, said today.

CSR is responsible for one of the world's biggest asbestos death tolls, the result of its deadly blue asbestos mine in Wittenoom in Western Australia which operated from the 1940's until its closure in 1966.

CSR has announced it intends to separate its sugar and building products operations into separate listed entities. Recent reports suggest CSR will hived off its asbestos liability to the building entity.

Mr Gordon said CSR must learn the lessons of the disastrous James Hardie restructure that saw its executives try to abandon asbestos victims.

"CSR must allay the fears of past and future asbestos victims by making it very clear the restructure will not impact on compensation payments to its former workers and other victims.

"The death toll from CSR's blue asbestos mine is still growing - miners, mill workers, wives and children and even visitors to the town are still being diagnosed with incurable cancer.

"James Hardie caused untold distress and destroyed its reputation through its attempt to cheat the victims of its negligence.

"CSR, which values its reputation as an iconic Australian company, should reject the Hardie's approach or face a long, drawn out battle with asbestos victims and all of their supporters," Mr Gordon said.

Blue asbestos is the most toxic form of asbestos and hundreds of former workers have died after developing mesothelioma, lung cancer or asbestosis.

Former workers and residents are still being diagnosed with fatal diseases. CSR made no attempt to clean up the town after closing the mine leaving a deadly legacy which threatens the health of visitors to this day.

Peter Gordon conducted the first successful claim against CSR on behalf of a former miner, Klaus Rabenault, in 1988.

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