



• Miriam Miller has written a book about the human face of the asbestos tragedy.

Asbestos tales a deadly reminder on lead exports

WITH the lead trains ready to roll into Fremantle's port, a book about the asbestos scourge is a timely reminder of what can go horribly wrong.

During the housing boom of the 1960s, governments and construction companies couldn't get enough of the "magic mineral" and more than 300 tonnes of blue asbestos fibre came off ships every week at Fremantle Port.

Workers who rocked up to the docks hoping to make a quick buck are now dead or dying from asbestos-related illnesses.

Harrowing

Mount Pleasant author Miriam Miller's book *Shattered Lives* tells the personal, harrowing stories of these victims and their families around Australia.

It illustrates their remarkable resilience, humour and devotion



ARTS
BRENDAN FOSTER

to family and friends.

"Thousands of people died who worked at the waterfront because of their exposure to asbestos," Miller said.

"The problem was a lot of the workers started contracted the disease years after they retired, so people just didn't make the connection."

Even after it became obvious the wharfies were being killed by the fibres, it took years before they were able to secure ex-gratia payment of \$20,000 for asbestos-related health damage.

Fifteen years later, in 1999, Miller said a landmark High Court ruling saw Melbourne wharfie and mesothelioma victim Brian Crimmin win compensation for workplace exposure to asbestos.

The ruling meant waterfront workers around the country could sue the companies

responsible for their suffering.

But Miller said claiming compensation became a long, arduous battle because corporate giants like James Hardie weren't going to cough up the dough without a fight.

Daunting prospect

"They had top-flight legal teams, so going to court for sufferers was a daunting prospect," she said.

"Plus a lot of them were very ill, had lost their income stream and were under an enormous amount of stress."

The number of people dying from asbestos each year in Australia is a staggering 26,000 but the impact of the disease will not peak until 2025.

Miller avoids taking the hatchet to firms like James Hardie but concentrates on the victims' stories.

They are real and powerful accounts that bring home the devastating impact of asbestos-related illnesses on an unsuspecting workforce.