

## Background Notes: CHRYSOTILE ASBESTOS

- \* The only form of asbestos still mined and sold in the world today is chrysotile asbestos. Therefore when anyone refers to chrysotile asbestos, they are speaking of the form of asbestos that represents 100% of the asbestos sold in the world today.
- \* 95% of all asbestos that has ever been mined and traded in the world is chrysotile asbestos.
- \* All forms of asbestos, including chrysotile asbestos, are carcinogenic. This is the view of every independent organization that has examined the health risks of asbestos, including the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), the World Health Organization, the U.N. Environmental Program, the US Environmental Protection Agency, the Collegium Ramazzini, the Canadian Cancer Society, the Canadian Medical Association Journal, The Lancet, the International Labour Organization (ILO).
- \* The ILO has calculated that over 100,000 people worldwide suffer premature deaths from asbestos-related cancers and disease each year. The WHO estimates between 5 and 10 million people will ultimately die from asbestos-related diseases.
- \* The WHO believes asbestos to be the most important occupational carcinogen, causing 54% of all deaths from occupational cancers
- \* In Canada, asbestos-related disease is the most significant contributor to occupational mortality. A 2004 report found rates of mesothelioma among men in Quebec to be 9.5 times greater than for the rest of Canada and the rate for women to be amongst the highest in the world.<sup>1</sup> It is estimated that 1,500 workers in BC alone will die from asbestos-caused disease over the next five years. Asbestos continues to pose a health hazard, particularly in schools, as well as in many deteriorating homes on First Nations reserves.
- \* The World Bank has just released its Asbestos Good Practice Guidelines. These Guidelines require that the use of asbestos must be avoided in any new construction in projects funded by the World Bank around the world. The Guidelines also provide information on available safer alternatives to asbestos.
- \* The Canada Green Buildings Council, in its LEED (Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design) standards, forbids use of asbestos in all new construction. The Canadian government has committed itself to following these standards and is also spending millions of dollars to remove asbestos from the House of Commons.
- \* The last functioning asbestos mine, LAB Chrysotile Inc. recently filed for bankruptcy protection. A just released study, carried out by Laval University students, shows impressive success by this asbestos-mining region of Quebec in diversifying its economy away from asbestos. The newly-named region - Appalaches - now employs about 400 workers, or 7 per cent of its workers in asbestos mining, rather than the one-third employed in the industry in 1970. The mayor of Thetford Mines, Luc Berthold, states that this successful transformation is one of the best kept secrets in Quebec.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> INSPQ, The Epidemiology of Asbestos-Related Diseases in Quebec, 2004; <http://hesa.etui-rehs.org/uk/dossiers/files/293-EpidemiologyAsbestosQuebec.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> *La Vie après l'amiante*, 1<sup>er</sup> juin 2009  
[http://www.lactualite.com/societe/article.jsp?content=20090508\\_110955\\_5908&PAGE=2](http://www.lactualite.com/societe/article.jsp?content=20090508_110955_5908&PAGE=2)

\* Over 40 countries, including the following countries, have banned chrysotile asbestos: Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Chile, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Gabon, Germany, Greece, Honduras, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Kuwait, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Saudi Arabia, Seychelles, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom and Uruguay.

\* The International Trade Union Confederation, which represents 168 million workers in 155 countries has made an urgent appeal for all forms of asbestos to be banned. Likewise, the Canadian Labour Congress has asked the government to ban asbestos.

\* The World Health Organization has stated that the only way to prevent an epidemic of asbestos-related disease and death in developing countries is by eliminating the use of all forms of asbestos. Likewise, the International Labour Organization has called for a ban on asbestos.

\* The asbestos industry and the Canadian government admit that chrysotile asbestos is carcinogenic. The industry and the government claim that Canada only sells asbestos to where strict "controlled use" protections are in place.

\* A recent two-year government study in Quebec showed that only a tiny number of industrial plants were using asbestos and that there was a 100% failure rate to practise "safe use" standards. When, in an advanced, regulated country, like Canada, we find a 100% failure rate to practise "safe use" standards, it lacks credibility to claim that strict standards are being practised in the developing world, where we send our asbestos.

\* Canada sells 95% of its asbestos to poor countries where protections are virtually non-existent.

\* A Globe & Mail report<sup>3</sup>, as well as many other reports, have documented workers in developing countries handling asbestos without any protection.

\* The following Canadian organizations have called for a ban on asbestos: Prevent Cancer Now, Ban Asbestos Canada, Breast Cancer Action Montreal, Breast Cancer Research Education Fund, Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment, [Canadian Association of University Teachers](#), Canadian Auto Workers, Canadian Building Trades Council and all provincial building trades unions (including Quebec), Canadian Cancer Society, Canadian Environmental Law Association, Canadian Institute for Environmental Law and Policy, Canadian Labour Congress, Canadian Teachers' Federation, Canadian Union of Public Employees, CARWAH (Canadian Association of Researchers in Work and Health), Clean Production Action, David Suzuki Foundation, Ecojustice, MiningWatch Canada, Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers, Ontario College of Family Physicians, Ontario Teachers' Federation, Prevent Cancer Now, Rideau Institute for International Affairs, Saunders-Matthey Cancer Prevention Coalition, Sierra Club of Canada, Toxic-Free Canada, Women's Healthy Environments Network

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<sup>3</sup> *Asbestos shame. Canada's cancer-causing cargo. Our gift to the world, Globe and Mail, October 27, 2007*