

RESOLUTION 9**Ban the Mining, Production, Use and Export of Asbestos and Other Measures to Reduce Loss of Life From Asbestos-Related Disease**

BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Canadian Nurses Association (CNA) will directly, and in collaboration with CNA member associations and other stakeholders, advocate for the Government of Canada and pertinent jurisdictions to implement a comprehensive asbestos strategy.

Background

Asbestos is a naturally occurring mineral that has been of commercial value since the end of the 19th century for its properties of being strong and heat resistant.¹ The scientific consensus today is that exposure to all types² of asbestos causes a range of diseases including lung cancer, mesothelioma, asbestosis (fibrosis of the lungs), pleural plaques, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and other cancers such as laryngeal, gastrointestinal, ovarian, and kidney.^{3 4 5} Asbestos was declared a proven human carcinogen more than 20 years ago by the International Agency for Research on Cancer of the World Health Organization, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and the U.S. National Toxicology Program.⁶ As “there is no safe level of exposure to asbestos”⁷ and increased cancer risks have been observed in populations exposed to very low levels, the World Health Organization advises “the most efficient way to eliminate asbestos-related diseases is to stop using all types of asbestos.”⁸

Symptoms for asbestos-related diseases can take 10 to 50 years to manifest.⁹ It is estimated that about 125 million people globally are exposed to asbestos in the workplace and at least 90,000 people die each year from mesothelioma, asbestos-related lung cancer, and asbestosis resulting from occupational exposure.¹⁰ More than 90 per cent of the asbestosis used worldwide is in the manufacture of asbestos-cement sheets and pipes.¹¹ A pervasive problem with these materials being used in construction is community-wide exposure as asbestos fibers are released into the air and dust due to weather erosion and displacement when they are being cut or sawed with power tools.¹²

In Canada, asbestos-related diseases are the most significant contributor to occupational mortality. According to the Confédération des syndicats nationaux, the workers’ compensation figures for 2009 indicate that 84 per cent of deaths from occupational disease in Québec were caused by asbestos.¹³ Asbestos poses a health hazard for those working and/or living in communities near asbestos mines and/or production facilities¹⁴ as well as those exposed to asbestos in deteriorating buildings, including schools and homes in Aboriginal communities.^{15 16}

At least 52 countries,¹⁷ including all members of the European Union, have banned the use of all forms of asbestos, including Chrysotile.¹⁸ International and national civil society, environmental, labour, and health organizations that have called for an international ban of all forms of asbestos include the World Health Organization,¹⁹ International Labour Organization,²⁰ Environmental Health Trust,²¹ Collegium Ramazzini,²² Ban Asbestos Canada,²³ Canadian Labour Congress,²⁴ Canadian Cancer Society,²⁵ Canadian Medical Association,^{26 27} and the Canadian Public Health Association.^{28 29}

Canada has strict restrictions on the domestic use of asbestos under the *Hazardous Products Act* and the *Canadian Environmental Protection Act*³⁰ and there are currently projects underway to remove asbestos from Parliament and 24 Sussex Drive.³¹ Canada is the only western industrialized

country that still continues to mine and manufacture asbestos.³² In 2010, it was fifth largest producer of asbestos after Russia, China, Brazil, and Kazakhstan.³³ Canada exports 96 per cent of its asbestos, primarily to developing countries such as India, Indonesia, Thailand and Bangladesh, which lack regulation, enforcement, occupational health and safety resources and public awareness to protect workers, their families, and the public from asbestos-related harm.^{34 35} Even in industrialized countries such as Canada, there is ample historical³⁶ and current evidence that laws and regulations are not always enforced and so unsafe conditions exist in asbestos producing factories and in the construction industries.^{37 38} Canada, like most industrialized countries, is in the process of transitioning to safer, effective, and affordable alternatives to asbestos³⁹ at the same time as we are described as “exporting death made in Québec.”⁴⁰

There are two asbestos mines in Canada, which account for seven per cent of the world production of asbestos, worth a few hundred million dollars per year.⁴¹ The LAB Chrysolite Mine in Thetford Mines, Québec is “a few years from exhaustion” and the Jeffrey Mine in Asbestos, Québec is in bankruptcy protection.⁴² Andre Picard has pointed out that public money that has been used to promote and subsidize the sale of asbestos could be used to retrain and support the remaining 500 workers, many who are close to retirement age.⁴³ Public funds from both the federal and Québec governments have supported the asbestos lobby through the Chrysotile Institute (formerly known as the Asbestos Institute) to the tune of more than \$50 million dollars between 1984 and 2009.⁴⁴ In addition to the federal support of the Chrysotile Institute of \$250,000 per year⁴⁵ and industry support through various embassy events, the federal government has used trade threats to pressure other countries against banning asbestos.⁴⁶ As “an avid cheerleader for asbestos,”⁴⁷ Canada has “led a ferocious diplomatic opposition” to listing chrysotile under the Rotterdam Convention, unlike every other Western democracy.⁴⁸

Jeffrey Mine was once owned by an American company, Johns Manville, which was forced into bankruptcy in 1982 due to health-related lawsuits.⁴⁹ It is now owned by Bernard Coulombe, who is seeking to massively expand and extract 200,000 tonnes a year for the next 25 years.⁵⁰ Investissement Québec provided Jeffrey Mine with a \$3.5 million line of credit in the fall 2010⁵¹ and there is another \$58 million loan guarantee from the provincial government on the table pending attracting private investment.^{52 53}

With this possible revitalization of the Jeffrey Mine and yet another opportunity to add chrysotile to the Rotterdam Convention in June 2011,⁵⁴ now is the perfect time for nurses to speak out on this important public policy issue. A private member’s bill, Bill C-399, was first introduced on June 1, 2009 to amend the *Canadian Environmental Protection Act* to prohibit the mining and export of asbestos.⁵⁵ Building on this foundation, we can work together to address environmental determinants of cancer and other health issues to improve the health of the populations we serve.⁵⁶

Key elements of a comprehensive Asbestos Strategy include:

1. Introduce legislation to ban the mining, production, use and export of asbestos.
2. Cease public funding to promote the asbestos industry by defunding the Chrysotile Institute and stopping other forms of support such as loan guarantees.
3. Support the listing of Chrysotile asbestos under the Rotterdam Convention.
4. In partnership with all levels of government and public health agencies, establish a national surveillance system to assess the extent of asbestos-related diseases and track health outcomes for those with exposure to asbestos.
5. Maintain a public registry of buildings that contain asbestos including buildings on Aboriginal lands, government-owned structures, and privately-owned buildings. This will facilitate quicker identification of asbestos in degrading structures and safer management when repairs, removal, and renovations are being made.

6. Ensure complete removal and replacement of asbestos-containing vermiculite insulation in housing built in the 1960's to the 1980's in Aboriginal communities and military bases.
7. Ensure fair compensation is provided to all people across Canada with asbestos-related disease.
8. Provide just and adequate transition assistance for income support and training for workers who would lose their jobs as well as financial assistance to communities that will be impacted as a result of the closure of asbestos mines and production industry.

Submitted by the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario and the Ontario Nurses for the
Environment Interest Group

¹ Ruff, K. (2009). **Exporting Harm: How Canada Markets Asbestos to the Developing World**. Ottawa: Rideau Institute, 5. Retrieved June 3, 2011 from: <http://www.rideauinstitute.ca/?s=exporting+harm&x=0&y=0>

² "The principal varieties of asbestos are chrysotile, a serpentine material, and crocidolite, amosite, anthophyllite, tremolite and actinolite, which are amphiboles." World Health Organization (WHO). (2006). [**Elimination of Asbestos-Related Diseases**. Geneva: Author, 1. Retrieved on March 21, 2011 from: http://whqlibdoc.who.int/hq/2006/WHO_SDE_OEH_06.03_eng.pdf

³ WHO, 1.

⁴ LaDou, J., Castleman, B., Frank, A. et al. (2010). The Case for a Global Ban on Asbestos. **Environmental Health Perspectives**. 118 (7), 897.

⁵ Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers Inc. (n.d.) **Asbestos**. Toronto: Author, 2. Retrieved on March 22, 2011 from: <http://www.ohcow.on.ca/resources/handbooks/asbestos/asbestos.pdf>

⁶ LaDou, et al., 897.

⁷ LaDou, et al., 897.

⁸ WHO, 2.

⁹ Canadian Public Health Association (CPHA). (2010). **CPHA Position Statement: Call for a ban on the mining, transformation and export of Chrysotile Asbestos**, 2. Retrieved on March 21, 2011 from: http://www.cpha.ca/uploads/policy/position_asbestos_e.pdf

¹⁰ WHO, 1.

¹¹ Collegium Ramazzini (2011). Asbestos is Still With Us: Repeat Call for a Universal Ban. **American Journal of Industrial Medicine**. 54(2): 168-173. Retrieved June 5, 2011 from: <http://www.collegiumramazzini.org/publications.asp>

¹² Ibid.

¹³ CPHA, 2.

¹⁴ Institut national de santé publique Québec (2010). **Additional Information on Asbestos in Québec**. Québec: Author. Retrieved June 5, 2011 from <http://www.inspq.qc.ca/english/amiante/infos.asp?e=cp>

¹⁵ Collegium Ramazzini.

¹⁶ Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (2008). **Information on Vermiculite Insulation Containing Asbestos**. Ottawa: Author. Retrieved June 5, 2011 from <http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ai/mr/is/ver-eng.asp>

¹⁷ Picard, A. (2011). Government investment in asbestos is morally bankrupt. **Globe and Mail**. May 13, 2011.

¹⁸ The International Ban Asbestos Secretariat lists 55 countries but that includes Croatia, which reversed its ban due to political pressure and Mongolia where enforcement has been problematic. International Ban Asbestos Secretariat (2011). **Current Asbestos Ban and Restrictions**. Updated January 6, 2011. Retrieved on June 5, 2011 from http://www.ibasecretariat.org/alpha_ban_list.php

¹⁹ WHO, 2.

²⁰ International Labour Organization. (2006). **ILO Global Asbestos Campaign**. Resolution Concerning Asbestos, 2006. Retrieved June 5, 2011 from <http://www.hazards.org/asbestos/ilo.htm#resolution>

²¹ Environmental Health Trust and Cancer Association of South Africa (2010). **Letter to Premier Charest**. Wyoming and Johannesburg: Authors. January 28, 2010.

²² Collegium Ramazzini.

²³ Ban Asbestos Canada (n.d.). Retrieved June 5, 2011 from <http://www.bacanada.org>

²⁴ Canadian Labour Congress (n.d.). **Canadian Labour Congress Policy on Asbestos**. Ottawa: Author. Retrieved June 5, 2011 from: www.canadianlabour.ca/sites/default/files/Asbestos_PolicyE.pdf

²⁵ Canadian Cancer Society (2010). **Asbestos: Our Position**. Toronto: Author. Retrieved on June 5, 2011 http://www.cancer.ca/Canadawide/Prevention/Cancer%20risk%20around%20you/Asbestos.aspx?sc_lang=en

-
- ²⁶ Canadian Public Health Association, Canadian Medical Association and National Specialty Society for Community Medicine. (2010). **Canada still one of the world's largest exporter of Chrysotile asbestos**. Ottawa: Authors. Retrieved on March 21, 2011 from: http://www.cpha.ca/uploads/media/asbestos_e.pdf
- ²⁷ Attaran, A., Boyd, D., & Stanbrook, M. (2008) Editorial: Asbestos mortality: a Canadian Export. **Canadian Medical Association Journal**. 179 (9), 871-872.
- ²⁸ CPHA
- ²⁹ Paradis, G. (2010). Ban all production and export of Chrysotile asbestos. **Canadian Public Health Association Journal**. 101(5), 352.
- ³⁰ Canadian Public Health Association, Canadian Medical Association & National Specialty Society for Community Medicine.
- ³¹ Picard, A. (2011). Government investment in asbestos is morally bankrupt. **Globe and Mail**. May 13, 2011.
- ³² CPHA, 2.
- ³³ United States Geological Survey (2011). **Mineral Commodity Summaries: Asbestos**. January 2011, 23. Retrieved June 5, 2011 from <http://minerals.usgs.gov/minerals/pubs/commodity/asbestos/>
- ³⁴ Attaran, A. & Boyd, D.R. (2008). Asbestos Mortality: a Canadian export. **Canadian Medical Association Journal**, 179(9), 871.
- ³⁵ Picard, A. (2011). Government investment in asbestos is morally bankrupt. **Globe and Mail**. May 13, 2011.
- ³⁶ Keith, M., & Brophy, J. (2004). Participatory mapping of occupational hazards and disease among asbestos-exposed workers from a foundry and insulation complex in Canada. **International Journal of Occupational and Environmental Health**. 10(2), 148.
- ³⁷ Institut national de santé publique Québec (2011). Asbestos. Québec: Author. Retrieved June 5, 2011 from <http://www.inspq.qc.ca/english/amiante/default.asp?e=cp>
- ³⁸ Institut national de santé publique Québec (2005). **Advisory: The Use of Chrysotile Asbestos in Québec**. Québec: Author. Retrieved June 5, 2011 from <http://www.inspq.qc.ca/english/amiante/publications.asp?e=cp#393>
- ³⁹ Attaran, A. & Boyd, D.R. (2008). Asbestos Mortality: a Canadian export. **Canadian Medical Association Journal**, 179(9), 871.
- ⁴⁰ Picard, A. (2011). Government investment in asbestos is morally bankrupt. **Globe and Mail**. May 13, 2011.
- ⁴¹ Ibid.
- ⁴² Ibid.
- ⁴³ Ibid.
- ⁴⁴ Ruff, 7.
- ⁴⁵ Picard.
- ⁴⁶ After France banned asbestos in 1997, the Canadian government filed a complaint with the World Trade Organization asking that France should rescind its "irrational and disproportionate" ban on asbestos. The WTO dismissed Canada's case in 2000 "ruling that chrysotile asbestos is a proven carcinogen, that there is no safe level of exposure to chrysotile asbestos and that 'controlled use' was not realistic." Trade threats against South Africa were also not successful. Ruff, 14-15.
- ⁴⁷ CBC News (2008). Canada an 'avid cheerleader' for asbestos: CMAJ editorial. **CBC News**. October 21, 2008.
- ⁴⁸ Attaran, Boyd, & Stanbrook, 871.
- ⁴⁹ Austen, I. In a town called Asbestos, a plan to restart the industry that made it prosperous. **New York Times**, February 3, 2011.
- ⁵⁰ Picard.
- ⁵¹ CBC News(2011). Que. backs asbestos mine launch. **CBC News**. April 13, 2011.
- ⁵² Picard
- ⁵³ Baron & Budd (2011). Canada's Asbestos Industry Having Trouble Securing Funds. **Mesothelioma News**. May 26, 2011. Retrieved June 5, 2011 from <http://www.mesotheliomanews.com/2011/05/26/canada%E2%80%99s-asbestos-industry-trouble-securing-funds-for-revitalization/>
- ⁵⁴ Clapper Patti Schweizer & Mason (2011). International Skepticism About Placing Asbestos on Global Blacklist. January 21, 2011. <http://www.mesothelioma-attorney.com/asbestos/news/International-Skepticism-About-Placing-Asbestos-on-Global-Blacklist/728>
- ⁵⁵ *Bill C-399: An act to amend the Canadian Environmental Protection Act*. 1st Reading, June, 2009, 40th Parliament, 2nd Session, 2009. (Online). Ottawa: Public Works and Government Services Canada, 2011. Available: <http://www.parl.gc.ca/LegisInfo/BillDetails.aspx?Language=E&Mode=1&billId=4328179&View=3> (June 3, 2011).
- ⁵⁶ Canadian Nurses Association (2008). Resolution: Environmental Determinants of Health. Retrieved on March 22, 2011 from: http://www.cna-nurses.ca/CNA/documents/pdf/publications/Resolution4_Environmental_Determinant_of_Health_2008_e.pdf