

**British Response to Thai article: “Lessons learned from asbestos ban in England ...will the English asbestos ban history haunt Thailand?”**

Having read the English translation of a Thai article entitled “*Lessons learned from asbestos ban in England ...will the English asbestos ban history haunt Thailand?*,” I make the following observations and comments:

The Thai news article does not state that Chrysotile asbestos is a Class 1 carcinogen and its ability to cause irreversible lung disease, including the terminal cancer Mesothelioma has long been recognized by the UK Government, EU, United Nations and World Health Organisation, amongst others. In addition, a 2011 review by the UK Chief Government Scientific adviser upheld the view that chrysotile asbestos can cause these diseases.<sup>i</sup>

There is no published evidence to prove that “*50,000 members of National Farmers’ Union (NFU) of England [are] greatly affected by the Chrysotile asbestos ban*”

The only known published source for a calculation that states costs of £6 billion have been incurred are just two articles published in the Christopher Booker Notebook comments section of the Sunday Telegraph.<sup>ii</sup>

The estimate of £6 billion was explained by Mr Booker in 2008 by suggesting 50,000 farm buildings were affected that contained asbestos cement material amounting to an average of 120 tonnes per building. No published figures supporting this calculation have been cited.

If an asbestos cement sheet weighs approximately 20kgs per square metre then the “average” of 120 tonnes quoted by Mr Booker equates to each of the 50,000 farm buildings containing about 6000 square metres of asbestos cement sheeting. There appears to be no published information to substantiate these calculations.

In addition to this fatal flaw in the £6 billion postulation is any suggestion that UK Regulations relating to asbestos force the demolition of all farm buildings that contain asbestos cement products. This is not the case. There is no compulsion to force the removal of asbestos cement material and replace it with a non-asbestos alternative. It remains lawful for these buildings to be retained for their designed lifespan. The figure cited of £6 billion appears to be an unsubstantiated and grossly inaccurate conflation.

Mr Edgely’s personally quoted example of a cost “as high as £42,000” required further information and analysis, especially as it appears, according to an NFU branch press release,<sup>iii</sup> that his presentation was made in relation to farm business diversification: If Mr Edgely’s business was considering the change of use of an agricultural building, that required significant structural changes, then local authority planning consent and appropriate Building Regulations may be required, irrespective of whether the building contained asbestos cement material. To suggest that the UK Regulations make it compulsory to removal all asbestos from agricultural farm buildings is misleading.

Furthermore, in Mr Edgely’s calculations, there may be demolition and replacement building material costs irrespective of what the previous building fabric contained.

The Hazardous Waste (England and Wales) Regulations 2005 and the Agricultural Waste Regulations” The Waste Management (England and Wales) Regulations 2006, (S.I. 2006 No.

9371<sup>iv</sup>) govern matters relating to such waste disposal. A site only has to be registered as a hazardous waste producer with the Environment Agency if more than 200kg of asbestos containing waste (or 500kg of agricultural asbestos waste) is removed from a site. Based on an estimate of 20kg per square metre, the 500kg threshold may equate to approximately 25 square metres of asbestos cement sheeting.

The previous practice that some landowners engaged in of digging holes and burying waste themselves is no longer permitted. Since 2007 the uncontrolled burning or tipping of waste on farms has become illegal.<sup>v</sup>

This change to waste disposal may incur an increased cost to landowners, but it would only be a fraction of the whole amount of any demolition and replacement costs.

The UK Government estimated that the entire annual cost impact of the Agricultural Waste Regulations would be £28m - £70m with a mid point average estimated at £49.23m.<sup>vi</sup> This is a small fraction of the £6,000,000,000 suggested by Mr Booker just for asbestos cement agricultural waste.

Finally the Thai article quotes a Mrs Sally Stocking claiming that 100 pig farms in her area have closed because of UK Asbestos Regulations. However, there are no published accounts anywhere in the UK of Mrs Stockings making this claim. However, Mrs Stocking has been quoted in the UK press stating that high feed prices and bad weather have caused some farmers financial difficulties.<sup>vii</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> For more information, see the UK Government Office for Science webpage: <http://www.bis.gov.uk/go-science/science-in-government/global-issues/health/asbestos>

<sup>ii</sup> Sunday Telegraph: 28/5/2008 and 14/7/2012.

<sup>iii</sup> <http://www.nfuonline.com/Regions/South-East/News/Thai-farmers-talk-agriculture-with-NFU/>

<sup>iv</sup> <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2006/937/contents/made>

<sup>v</sup> <http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/business/sectors/32777.aspx>

<sup>vi</sup> <http://archive.defra.gov.uk/environment/waste/topics/farm/documents/agwaste-faq.pdf> see page 26.

<sup>vii</sup>

[http://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/yourtown/wallingford/9868692.Pig\\_farmers\\_count\\_cost\\_of\\_rising\\_feed\\_bills\\_and\\_bad\\_weather/](http://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/yourtown/wallingford/9868692.Pig_farmers_count_cost_of_rising_feed_bills_and_bad_weather/)

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