

ROCA - Rotterdam Convention Alliance

ROCA is an Alliance of Environmental, Labour and Health organizations around the world working to promote the full and effective implementation of the Rotterdam Convention

October 30, 2008 Update by Kathleen Ruff, Coordinator of the Rotterdam Convention Alliance, currently attending COP4 in Rome

Contrary to what is being reported in the media, the Conference here in Rome has NOT made a decision regarding the listing of chrysotile asbestos.

Apparently a story is being carried by the Canadian media saying that the Rotterdam Convention Conference of the Parties taking place here in Rome has made a decision to not place chrysotile asbestos on the Convention's list of hazardous chemicals that require prior informed consent.

This is NOT correct. The Parties decided to continue working to try to achieve a consensus decision on chrysotile asbestos. Dr Barry Reville, head of the Australian delegation, was mandated by the chair to meet with Parties, non-Parties and observers to do everything possible to try and achieve some draft text for a consensus decision.

Dr Reville held two meetings today (October 29) and I attended both. It is currently 9.25 p.m. and we just finished the 2nd meeting. It addressed the issue of the present lack of consensus to list two of the hazardous substances recommended for listing by the Convention's expert scientific body (the Chemical Review Committee) - chrysotile asbestos and endosulfan.

The meeting that just finished was attended by India (the government representatives and the representative of the Indian Chemical Council, which strongly opposes listing of the two substances) and Ukraine, both of whom have refused to support the listing of chrysotile asbestos. Russia (a non-Party) also attended. Canada was not present, but Mr Godbout, president of the Chrysotile Institute was present. Also representatives of Senegal, the EU, Argentina, Austria and other countries were present, two of whom were also members of the Chemical Review Committee.

Dr Reville will hold another meeting tomorrow afternoon (October 30) that will be open only to Parties (that means that non-Parties and industry and NGO observers will not be able to attend).

The decision of whether to list chrysotile asbestos will not be made until after Dr Reville reports back to the plenary and, if he is successful, will present draft text for a consensus decision on chrysotile asbestos.

It seems to me important that the misinformation that has been given to the Canadian public be corrected. A hard struggle is being waged to try to achieve a consensus decision to list chrysotile asbestos. This effort may prove to be unsuccessful. But as of now it is simply incorrect to say that a decision not to list chrysotile asbestos has been taken.

I hope, out of respect for accuracy and out of respect for the hard work and commitment of many people here working to try and get the Convention to work and deliver on the promise it made to developing countries, it is important to correct the misinformation.

I think we will likely go down to the wire and that a decision on chrysotile asbestos will likely not be taken until Friday.