

The Right Hon. Paul Edgar Philippe Martin, P.C., M.P.
Prime Minister
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A6 Canada
6th September 2004

Dear Prime Minister,

From 1912 onwards, with rare exceptions, Canadian physicians have a sorry history of denying that exposure to chrysotile constituted a human health hazard in its mines and mills. This did not fit in with the experience of physicians and factory inspectors in Britain (1898, 1899, 1912, 1931), in France (1906), in America (1918, 1938) and in Italy (1908, 1940), nor that of North American actuaries (1918, 1934).

In 1955, without explanation a company doctor reported a large number of cases of asbestosis of varying degrees, and cases of bronchial carcinoma and malignant mesothelioma in Quebec's miners and millers. Two Canadian governmental inquiries (Quebec, 1976; Ontario, 1984) confirmed that chrysotile was a hazardous agent and both had sufficiently serious reservations about the qualitative and quantitative aspects of data from the McGill studies as to consider them unreliable for deriving dose-response relationships. They settled for the 2 fibre hygiene standard arrived at by the British Occupational Hygiene Society in 1968, despite BOHS authors having realized by 1974 that they had seriously underestimated chrysotile's danger.

In the face of WHO, ILO and IARC opinions as to the unacceptable hazards of chrysotile, leaving aside a number of countries who have already legislated against the use of all forms of asbestos, it is alleged that in the context of a UN convention regulating the global trade in hazardous chemicals, Canada proposes to repeat its veto. It is not too late for Canada to join its old ally France and other Developed Countries in their asbestos policy.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Morris Greenberg
MB FRCP FFOM