Minister
of Natural Resources

Ministre
des Ressources naturelles

Ottawa, Canada K1A 0E4

cc Anne v. Werel
Wim v. Veelen
Leo Haubrech

DEC 1 4 2010

Ms. Agnes Jongerius
President FNV
Hoofdkantoor
Postbus 8456
1005 AL Amsterdam
NETHERLANDS

Dear Ms. Jongerius:

The Prime Minister's Office has forwarded to me a copy of your letter of September 24, 2010, in which you express some concerns related to Canada's position with respect to chrysotile asbestos.

It is important first to clarify how we use the term "asbestos." A great deal of confusion arises from the common use of the generic commercial term "asbestos" to describe two different and distinct classes of mineral fibres found naturally in rock formations around the world: amphibole and serpentine.

Chrysotile, the only "asbestos" fibre produced in and exported from Canada, belongs to the serpentine class. Serpentine minerals are structurally and chemically different from the amphiboles. Chrysotile is the only "asbestos" fibre that does not belong to the amphibole group. The risk posed by using chrysotile fibres can be managed if adequate controls, such as those established in Canada, are implemented and completely observed.

In 1979, the Government of Canada adopted the controlled-use approach to asbestos. This means that, through the enforcement of appropriate regulations to rigorously control exposure to chrysotile, the health risks associated with processes and products can be reduced to acceptable levels.

Chrysotile is regulated under the *Hazardous Products Act*. The objective of the regulations is to prevent the exposure of consumers to products containing or consisting entirely of any type of asbestos and which can readily shed loose fibres that can be inhaled and cause adverse health effects. Canada does not ban naturally-occurring substances. Canada manages the risks of products and practices derived from these substances where and when

required and applicable. Where exposures and subsequent risks cannot be properly managed, the specific uses are discontinued or prohibited.

The illnesses we are currently seeing in countries that have intensively used "asbestos" fibres are linked to past high-level exposures and inappropriate uses. These uses have been prohibited or discontinued in Canada since the late 1970s. A total ban on chrysotile is neither necessary nor appropriate. Implementing a ban would not protect workers or the public against past uses that have been prohibited for many years.

More than 93 percent of the world production of chrysotile is used in chryso-cement-manufactured products in the form of pipes, sheets and shingles. Five percent is used for friction materials such as brake pads and linings. Canadian-manufactured products include brake pads, gaskets and specialty products. Fibres are encapsulated in a matrix in those products, thus preventing release of fibres and allowing their use.

We all share the objective of protecting human health. Since 1979, Canada has promoted the controlled-use approach, both domestically and internationally. Canada continues to work with other countries on matters related to the safe use of chrysotile through the Chrysotile Institute.

The Chrysotile Institute, a not-for-profit organization established in 1984 by the governments of Canada and Quebec, labour and industry, has the mandate to promote the controlled use of chrysotile domestically and internationally. The Institute provides information to governments, industry, unions, media and the general public on how to safely manage the risks associated with the handling of chrysotile fibres. This information includes technical regulations, control measures, standards and best practices. Over the years, the Institute has assisted knowledge and technology transfer in more than 60 countries.

Thank you for writing.

Yours sincerely,

The Honourable Christian Paradis, P.C., M.P. (Mégantic–L'Érable)

c.c.: The Honourable Leona Aglukkaq, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Health