



European Federation
of Building
and Woodworkers



MEDIA RELEASE

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Albania's Asbestos Crisis!

Tirana, Albania: Today, European campaigners declared support for the denunciation by colleagues in Albania of their government's neglect of the asbestos hazard and issued dire warnings of the tragic consequences for occupational and public health.

According to Professor Dr. Romeo Hanxhari of The Association of New Environmental Policies (ANEP):

“The failure to implement safety procedures to minimize hazardous exposures during the removal of asbestos-cement materials in Albania is long-standing. Nevertheless, the situation has now deteriorated to such a point that the health of local communities is seriously at risk. Work commissioned by the City Tirana to reconstruct Tirana market, in the centre of the capital, is being carried out in an unsafe and unacceptable manner resulting in airborne fibres being inhaled and environmental pollution being dispersed in adjacent areas.

Contractors have demolished old buildings with asbestos-cement roofs using shovels and heavy machinery to break toxic roofing tiles. Absolutely no measures were taken to prevent the release of asbestos fibres and ensure safe working conditions for operatives or a safe environment for the public.”

The failings detailed above have been reported on Albanian TV and via online media sites.¹

Commenting on the situation Rolf Gehring, Political Secretary for Safety and Health of the European Building and Woodworkers (EFBWW), said:

“The EFBWW, which has been progressing work on asbestos information modules for workers and the public for several years, is well aware of the conditions that persist in many European countries. Nevertheless, we were shocked to hear about these developments in Albania; absolutely no measures were taken to prevent the release of asbestos fibres or ensure safe working conditions for operatives or a safe environment for the public. There is no question that such actions put everyone at risk.

¹ See: ABC TV news report in which ANEP exposed this situation:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jqc6YYO1jIY>

Online media news of ANEP protest:

<http://www.lapsi.al/lajme/2016/01/21/skandaloze-pun%C3%ABtor%C3%ABt-e-bashkis%C3%AB-heqin-eternitin-kancerogjen-me-lopat%C3%AB#.VqnY-5orLIU>

Our federation is making representations to the Municipality of Tirana and to the Government of Albania about the deadly consequences of human asbestos exposures and is offering our assistance to improve conditions. We endorse the statements of Professor Dr. Romeo Hanxhari and urge the authorities to work closely with him and his colleagues at The Association of New Environmental Policies for the sake of all Albanians.”

Echoing Mr Gehring’s comments, Eric Jonckheere from the Belgian Association of Asbestos Victims (ABEVA), said:

“Belgian people now suffering from asbestos-related diseases were hazardously exposed to asbestos at work, at home or environmentally. The type of working practices described at the Tirana market are extremely dangerous. Anyone in the area is at risk as are, of course, the workers. The fibers the workers take home on their clothes also pose a hazard to their wives, children and friends. Our association expresses solidarity with Albanian colleagues and our willingness to work with them to end these exposures.”

It is to be hoped that given Albania’s EU candidate status, the Government will take an active interest in promptly remedying the situation and developing occupational health and safety asbestos legislation in line with EU provisions and ensuring that these measures are fully implemented.

Notes to Editors

1. Asbestos, an acknowledged carcinogen, has created the Europe’s most deadly epidemic of occupational disease. Exposure to asbestos can cause a variety of diseases: lethal cancers and severely debilitating respiratory conditions.
2. After more than a century, the use of asbestos was finally banned in EU member states by Annex 1 of Directive 76/769/EEC (1999) on dangerous substances and preparations. From January 1, 2005, the use of asbestos and asbestos-containing products was prohibited with minor derogations.
3. Albania has no asbestos ban or regulations to protect citizens from the health hazard.² There no specific legislation on asbestos and asbestos is only included on the official list of “dangerous wastes generated in the construction sector” but no technical guidelines have been approved to ensure safe practices are followed. It is believed that around 200,000 tonnes of asbestos were used in Albania; the majority of the asbestos consumed into the manufacture of asbestos-cement building products which were widely used.
4. A 2009 study undertaken by ANEP found asbestos products in schools, hospitals, markets, factories and bus stations; of 27 samples collected, 23 contained asbestos. Key asbestos hotspots identified through the ANEP survey included: Tirana, Vlora, Korça, Bajram Curri, Lushnja, etc. In 2012, ANEP and its collaborators published the results of a 7-year study in the book entitled: “Azbesti – vrasesi i heshtur kancerogjen. Emergjenca Amiant ne Shqiperi” (*Asbestos – the silent carcinogenic killer. The ASBESTOS*

² Kazan-Allen L. *Europe’s Asbestos Catastrophe*. November 9, 2012.
<http://ibasecretariat.org/lka-bruss-europes-asbestos-catastrophe-report-2012.php>

emergency in Albania), ISBN 978-9928-4110-7-5. The study has been delivered to all the stakeholders in Albania.

5. For more information, please contact:

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