

List Chrysotile Asbestos in PIC List Ban Asbestos NOW!

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Victims and Activists urge the Indian Government to Ban all forms of asbestos and allow listing of chrysotile asbestos as a hazardous substance at an upcoming UN meeting

In a press conference held today, Victims of Asbestos related disorders, activists, doctors among others called on the Government to institute a mechanism for immediate and urgent ban on all forms of asbestos in the country along with listing of Chrysotile Asbestos as a hazardous substance at the upcoming Rotterdam convention to be held next month in Geneva.

Considering the public health disaster caused by Asbestos, 55 countries have banned any use of asbestos. India has placed a ban on mining of all forms of asbestos and the National Green Tribunal has also asked for status reports from Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change regarding scientific closure of all asbestos mines in the country.

However, the country continues to import large quantities of fibres from countries like Russia, Brazil and Kazakhstan. Imports have risen from 253,382 tonnes in 2006 to 473,240 tonnes in 2012. "This vast amount of asbestos, being placed in homes and schools across India, are a deadly time bomb that will go on causing suffering and deaths for decade to come," said Dr V Murlidhar, Pneumoconiosis Compensation Board, Turner & Newall Trust.

On March 23, 2015 dozens of prestigious scientific organizations and scientists from around the world issued a Statement calling on the Government of India to withdraw a discredited scientific study on Chrysotile (white) Asbestos carried out by NIOH and to stop blocking the listing of Chrysotile Asbestos as a hazardous substance at an upcoming UN meeting.

"The study has no scientific credibility," states Dr. Philip Landrigan, President of the Collegium Ramazzini and Dean for Global Health, Icahn School of Medicine, Mount Sinai, New York. "It is flawed in the design, methodology and interpretation of the results."

The criteria for selection of workers for the study exposes a deliberate attempt by NIOH to 'not' find cases of asbestos related illnesses. For instance, no retired workers were selected for the study or some workers who had worked only for 5 years were chosen for the study thereby defying the logic /concept of 'healthy worker effect' which is universally accepted to do such studies.

While there is no systematic monitoring and reporting of asbestos related diseases (ARD) in India, even then 225 cases of mesothelioma, a rare form of cancer found in people exposed to all forms of asbestos fibres, has been reported by the Indian cancer registry, the Gujarat Cancer Institute and the Tata Cancer Institute. Independent studies in Mumbai, Madhya Pradesh and Jharkhand of former asbestos product manufacturing factory/mine workers have identified over 800 cases of asbestosis, most of whom have also been compensated for contracting ARD due to work related exposure. New data being collected by independent health organisations show diseases amongst family members of workers due to secondary and environmental exposures. Several legal cases are pending in labour and civil courts in Gujarat, Maharashtra and Rajasthan.

“My life is in ruins because of asbestos. My chest feels like burning”, said Mr Naran Mehra, suffering from Asbestosis. “I can walk barely 100 metres before I have to stop and rest” said Mr Chinnapan who used to work with an Asbestos Cement Roof sheet company and is suffering from Asbestosis. Mr Shirgaokar from Mumbai said “I got wages for giving my labour to the company but the company also took away my health”

Mr. Ramesh Vats, President of Mahanagar Asangathit Mazdoor Union and also Former President of the Union at the Delhi Transport Corporation stated “While the whole world is progressively moving towards banning Asbestos, in striking contrast India has been increasing imports of the deadly Chrysotile Asbestos, despite it being acknowledged as a known carcinogen responsible for nearly 107,000 deaths each year by the WHO. We urge the Indian Government not to turn a blind eye towards the long-term hazards related to Asbestos usage and exposure”.

We therefore request Government of India to

1. Withdraw the NIOH study, which does not hold up to any credible scientific scrutiny
2. Enable listing of Chrysotile asbestos in the UN hazardous substances list in the upcoming Conference in May 2015, so that the trading countries have a prior knowledge about the health implications of Chrysotile asbestos before importing it.
3. Place a ban on all forms of asbestos in the country.
4. Undertake a survey of all workers (current and former) of factories and mines using asbestos fibres to comprehensively identify victims of asbestos related diseases.
5. Institute a framework to identify / use alternate products to replace asbestos
6. Ensure adequate capacity of doctors and hospitals in the country to diagnose workers suffering from Asbestos related disorders

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