



OCCUPATIONAL & ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH NETWORK OF INDIA

Date: 12th September, 2017

To,
Honourable Rashtrapatiji,
Rashtrapati Bhavan,
New Delhi.

Subject: Protection of citizens from toxic white Asbestos.

Your Excellency,

We wish to draw your attention towards uncontrolled use of unnoticed hazardous white asbestos.

In the recent 8th Conference of Parties (COP) of UN's Rotterdam convention at Geneva this May, Indian helped block inclusion of the chrysotile (white asbestos) in the Rotterdam Convention Hazardous Substances list (Annex III). Some 60 countries including Japan, Europe, Australia and also International Labour Organization and World Health Organization firmly believe that 'safe and controlled use' of asbestos is not possible. 60 countries including European countries including Nepal and Sri Lanka have either banned use of all forms of asbestos or severely restricts. The convention had put an eye opening figure that more than 100,000 people die each year from various asbestos related diseases including a rare cancer of Mesothelioma.

We submit that if what the Indian delegation has been made to say to at the UN meet is indeed the case then how is it that Union Environment Ministry's Vision Statement that says, "Alternatives to asbestos may be used to the extent possible and use of asbestos may be phased out". The vision statement is available on ministry's website. (<http://www.moef.nic.in/sites/default/files/visenvhealth.pdf>)

We submit that there is an overwhelming scientific consensus that all forms of asbestos, including chrysotile asbestos, are hazardous to health. But for the past many decades, the asbestos industry covered up and denied the scientific evidence to say that Chrysotile can be used safely under controlled conditions. As a consequence, millions of people have lost their lives and continue to lose them.



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We submit that given the fact that the delegation represents the voice of Government of India, how does the Indian delegation respond to the concept paper by Union Ministry of Labour presented at the 5th India-EU Joint Seminar on "Occupational Safety and Health"

saying "The Government of India is considering the ban on use of chrysotile asbestos in India to protect the workers and the general population against primary and secondary exposure to Chrysotile form of Asbestos." It has noted that "Asbestosis is yet another occupational disease of the Lungs which is on an increase under similar circumstances warranting concerted efforts of all stake holders to evolve strategies to curb this menace". The paper is available on ministry's website. (<https://toxicswatch.files.wordpress.com/2011/12/occupational-safety-and-health-september-2011.pdf>)

We submit that besides occupational hazard, asbestos is also an environmental hazard. There are several cases where non-workers have been found suffering from Asbestos related diseases. Asbestos fibres are very minute and may not be seen by naked eyes. They are so light weight that they keep flying in the air and do not settle down easily. Vehicles using asbestos brakes and clutch plates keep on releasing asbestos fibres in small quantity continuously. These flying fibres can be picked up by the wind and inhaled into human lungs.

Sir, we are highly impressed with your galvanized persona. Your journey from a small mud house in Bihar to the office of President of India is an inspiration for all of us. You know well what an ordinary citizen of this country passes through. You also know the health care situation where diagnosis of these diseases is very difficult and that the reason why we don't have any credible data of ARDs. Sir, we want you to use your good office to give wisdom and direction, in the vast interest of the citizens of this country in general and workers in particular, to the Government of India to take quick necessary actions to protect people from ARDs. Sir, we need to take inspiration and heed from our small neighbours like Nepal which has banned use of all asbestos products and Sri Lanka which has declared to ban asbestos roof sheets from 2018.

Thank you so much for your kind attention.

Jagdish Patel
National Coordinator