



OCCUPATIONAL & ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH NETWORK OF INDIA

Press Note

An Indian company is ready to buy 50,000 tonnes of ‘Cancer’

‘The Mirror’, a well-known daily newspaper of Zimbabwe reported that Government of Zimbabwe muscling its efforts to reopen the Shabani Mashaba Mines (SMM) a principle supplier of Asbestos. The state-run company was shut down amid financial scandals back in 2004 but is set to reopen at full capacity employing up to 5,000 workers. The efforts have been stepped up because an Indian company has shown a keen interest in importing 50,000 tonnes of SMM’s Asbestos.

It is important to note that, in recognition of its harmful effects asbestos mining is banned in India since three decades but industries exploit the loophole and import it from elsewhere. The companies continue to import vast quantities of asbestos and produce various products directly increasing public health risks and, definitively subject its workers to occupational diseases.

Asbestos, when inhaled causes Asbestosis (an inflammatory scarring of lung tissues which leads to permanent and irreversible damage to the respiratory system, weakening the immune system and overall functioning of the body.) Asbestos can also lead to lung cancer, cancer of mesothelioma and various other organ cancers. The risk associated with the use of asbestos is far greater than the benefits, ipso facto global consensus on banning the use of asbestos except for India.

For example, the asbestos sheets used in roofing on Anganwadis and other public spaces exposes children and adults alike to the harmful effects of Asbestos. The Indian company in question needs to be investigated. The government of India has the responsibility to protect its citizens through unilateral action to ban mining, import, production, sale and consumption of all materials based on asbestos with immediate effect.

The Rotterdam Convention is an international treaty to investigate, monitor and restrict trans-boundary transportation of toxic substances. The Indian delegation has stubbornly disagreed and has repeatedly blocked listing of chrysotile (white asbestos) in Rotterdam Convention Hazardous Substances list (Annex III). Even the subcontinent neighbours, Nepal and Sri Lanka, are well on their way to permanently ban production and consumption of asbestos. And we have a moral imperative to question the flagrant disregard with which our administration and governing politicians continue to ignore the constitutional and judicial rights of our own less fortunate brothers and sisters.

If an Indian company is planning to buy 50,000 tones of asbestos every year then it is with clear intention to profit out of mass disaster. It may very well be 50,000 tonnes of cancer being imported into the country. OEHNI severely criticises the unknown Indian company for their malicious intentions and condemns the attitude to profit out of death. OEHNI appeals to Zimbabwean government to permanently shut down all asbestos mines in the country and protects its citizens from this harmful substance.

Occupational and Environmental Health Network India has made a petition to his Honourable President of India to ban the use of asbestos in all form in all industries in India. In August this year, Kolkata High Court ordered not to use asbestos in repairing High Court building.

Jagdish Patel, National Coordinator