



PRESS RELEASE

May 25, 2020

Death, Duplicity and Double Standards

The announcement last week that the American pharmaceutical multinational Johnson & Johnson (J&J) was withdrawing its talc-based baby powder from sale in the U.S. and Canada was widely reported; once stocks are gone, only cornstarch-based baby powder will be sold in North America. Having indicted both COVID-19 and falling consumer demand as the cause of its actions, the company nevertheless reasserted its confidence “in the safety of talc-based Johnson’s Baby Powder... [and pledged] to vigorously defend the product, its safety, and the unfounded allegations against it and the Company in the courtroom.”¹

Reacting to the news that the asbestos-tainted baby powder would remain on sale in countries outside North America, Sugio Furuya, the Coordinator of the Asian Ban Asbestos Network (ABAN), said:

“Americans will no longer be able to purchase this deadly product. Unfortunately, some consumers will have no option as J&J’s cornstarch-based baby powder is not sold in their countries. The use of the asbestos-tainted talc-based baby powder will continue to endanger the health of citizens in both developed and developing countries. In some countries – like Australia, Brazil, the UK, Malaysia and Japan – both cornstarch- and talc-based baby powder are available. In India, only the talc-based product is sold. ABAN is appalled by the lethal double standards of this supposed healthcare conglomerate and urges the company to rethink its marketing strategy and issue a global not just continental recall.”

Clarifying the situation in his country, grassroots activist Mohit Gupta from the Occupational and Environment Health Network of India said:

“Johnson & Johnson’s talc-based baby powder is sold in India and is very popular. In fact, it has a dominant share in India’s very lucrative market for baby products. It is very shameful that the company has decided to continue sales in India as if Indian lives don’t matter. This is yet one more example of corporations putting profit before the lives of people. Instead of replacing the toxic baby powder with one free of asbestos in India, as they are doing in North America, they are just pushing sales of this hazardous product in a market with weak regulatory mechanisms, few testing guidelines and low consumer awareness. Failure of manufacturers to warn potential users of hazards posed by use of their product is a crime but I cannot imagine Johnson & Johnson putting labels on the cannisters of baby powder stating that this product is no longer sold in US and Canada because of health concerns.”

Confirming the popularity of J&J’s talc-based baby powder in Brazil, ban asbestos activist Fernanda Giannasi was scathing in her condemnation of J&J’s hypocrisy saying:

“The fact that this deadly product has been withdrawn from sale will protect the lives of generations of North Americans; it is a tragedy that the company took so long to act. I am

¹ Johnson & Johnson. *Johnson & Johnson Consumer Health Announces Discontinuation of Talc-based Johnson’s Baby Powder in U.S. and Canada*. May 19, 2020.
<https://www.jnj.com/our-company/johnson-johnson-consumer-health-announces-discontinuation-of-talc-based-johnsons-baby-powder-in-u-s-and-canada>

appalled, however, that the lives of Brazilians are of so little import to this ‘healthcare’ colossus that it will continue selling its toxic baby powder in Brazil when the use of this product can and has caused lung cancers, ovarian cancers and mesotheliomas. The cowardliness of Johnson & Johnson’s announcing its amoral and inadmissible marketing strategy at a time when my country and many others are engulfed in a disaster of unquantifiable proportions is an abomination.”

It is noteworthy that articles about Johnson & Johnson’s actions have been spun by the asbestos lobby in Russia – the world’s largest producer of chrysotile (white) asbestos – to defend asbestos and attack anti-asbestos activists. The following extracts were taken from a Russian language article published last week:

- “chrysotile asbestos... [is] harmless if certain safety rules are observed when mining and working with this product.”
- “Chrysotile has been successfully used for decades and continues to be used in Russia, the CIS countries, Latin America and Southeast Asia. There is no ban on the use of chrysotile asbestos even in the USA.”
- “Spanish scientists have also confirmed the safety of chrysotile asbestos.”
- “At the same time, chrysotile asbestos poses the least danger to people... As far back as 1986, 143 countries represented in the International Labor Organization unanimously approved Convention 162 “Safe Use of Asbestos”, which advocates strict regulation of the use of chrysotile, and not its prohibition...”
- “who is the next of the industrial giants to fall under the pressure of the anti-asbestos campaign.”²

“Human beings are placed in mortal danger by exposure to asbestos-contaminated baby powder just as they are by exposure to asbestos-containing building products,” said Laurie Kazan-Allen, the Coordinator of the International Ban Asbestos Secretariat. “If J&J fails to withdraw sales of the talc-based baby powder, then national governments, regional authorities and intergovernmental organizations must act unilaterally to prevent further deaths.”

² *Культивируемый в США страх перед асбестом позволил развернуть кампанию против Johnson&Johnson* [US-cultivated fear of asbestos has allowed a campaign against Johnson & Johnson]. May 21, 2020. <https://business-post.ru/kultiviruemyj-v-ssha-strah-pered-asbestom-pozvolil-razvernut-kampaniju-protiv-johnson-johnson/>

Notes for Editors

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2. Information about the groups which issued this press release can be accessed at:
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