

Open letter to the Rio + 20 Organizers: United Nations Conference For Sustainable Development

Mina de São Félix do Amianto: damaged man and nature

Used in various industries, amianto or asbestos (Latin and English respectively) is mined from metamorphic rocks. Of the two main groups of asbestos, most important commercially is chrysotile. In the early twentieth century until the 30s, Brazil still imported asbestos, but from 1937, SAMA (SA Mining asbestos) belonging to the Saint Gobain Group, began the process of exploitation for this ore in Brazil.

Installed in the 30's and operated until the end of the 60s, the mine of St. Felix of Asbestos in Bom Jesus da Serra-BA caused numerous impacts on the environment. Due to constant excavations, a crater 1 km in extension and 200 meters deep formed. By chance the crater reached groundwater and came into contact with drinking water. Furthermore, the destruction site triggered distinct changes in landscape features on a large scale.

Another problem related to the damage, is the health of former workers of the mine and local residents. They were exposed for a long time to the dust of asbestos. This mineral consists of microscopic fibers that stay suspended in the air over long distances and when inhaled, the long term effects are asbestosis or pulmonary fibrosis, lung cancer and mesatolioma.

From a visit to the mine of St. Felix Asbestos situated today in Bom Jesus da Serra - BA, students of 3rd Year (High School) of the Educational Institute Cecilia Meireles - IECEM in the city of Poções - BA, noted, on site, the precarious situation that is found in the region.

With the end of exploration in São Félix Mine, the company SAMA moved to the mine in the state of Goiás- Canabrava leaving behind a trail of environmental degradation, (about 700 hectares) as well as several former workers, many families abandoned and with their health affected. It is observed that the company, even being aware of the seriousness of the problem, did not take for themselves the responsibilities that were due: the reconstruction of degraded environment and to support the families of the former workers affected by asbestos dust.

Against this background, we hereby warn the population about the various problems related to asbestos, highlighting the lack of environmental responsibility by the mining company (SAMA, the Saint Gobain Group) and request that it take appropriate steps to make the environmental restoration of the whole area, as well as assume responsibility for all former employees and community members have been and are being affected by the fiber.

We can not remain silent before a problem that endangers the lives of the most diverse ecosystems. Thus, it is necessary for the immediate resolution of this problem so that future generations do not continue to suffer from the so-called "malignant fiber".

Poções, May 17, 2012

Participants of the Local Social Forum on "Mina de São Félix Asbestos: damaged man and nature":