

The Second SEA Ban network meeting on Hanoi 12-14 September 2018

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Urgent need to ban chrysotile asbestos within ASEAN countries

The South East Asia Ban Asbestos Conference 2018 brought together experts, policy makers and activists from 11 countries from 12-14 Sept 2018, at the La Thanh Hotel, Hanoi, Vietnam.

The meeting was co-hosted by Committee for Ethnic Minority Affairs (CEMA) Vietnam Government in cooperation with the Law and Policy of Sustainable Development Research Centre (LPSD) and Media Education for Community (MEC) Vietnam.

The 2 day Conference heard of the exciting news of the plans by governments in Vietnam and Laos to ban chrysotile asbestos in the next 2-5 years. Representatives of the government of Vietnam present in the meeting reaffirmed their commitment to the Road Map for implementation of a ban by 2023 at the latest as stated by the Prime Minister in January 2018. The meeting also heard the Lao PDR National Action Plan to Eliminate ARD has plan to ban in Laos in in 2020.

The meeting heard from scientists, trade unions, medical experts and community representatives from among the 11 countries, representatives from Committee of Ethnic Minority Affairs (CEMA) and Ministry of Industry and Trade from the Vietnam government and Australian government Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency -ASEA. Also in attendance Ministry of Construction, Ministry of Natural Resources Environment, Ministry of Health, the National Assembly Office of Vietnam, Food Safety Association and VGCL among many others.

Reports outlined latest global estimates of over 220,000 deaths each year currently from cancers related to chrysotile asbestos exposure were shared with the meeting. Many regions of the world don't use asbestos anymore. More than 75% of total global consumption of asbestos is now in Asia. Some of the biggest global consumers are in ASEAN including Indonesia, Vietnam, Thailand and Laos.

'We are greatly concerned at what the current use of chrysotile asbestos will mean for future cancer rates in ASEAN countries' said Mr Sugio Furuya, Convener of Asia Ban Asbestos Network.

'We commend the Vietnam and Lao Governments for their determination to ban asbestos in coming years and ABAN members will work closely with ban networks in the region to build momentum for more countries to ban chrysotile asbestos' he said.

'This meeting is important for us to share information with countries in our region. This shows we are heading in the right direction for a global ban on this deadly fibre' said Mdm Bui Thi An, from IRECO, Vietnam.

Currently more than 60 countries have formally banned chrysotile asbestos globally and another 70 countries do not report any current use of asbestos fibre in manufacturing.

The meeting committed to strengthen ban networks and participants agreed their determination to advocate for the health of workers and consumers in preventing unnecessary and avoidable cancers in ASEAN countries.

The meeting noted the momentum for national bans was strengthened by the asbestos bans in Brazil and Canada in 2017 and 2018 respectively.

The meeting discussed the 12 year block by some producer countries on the listing of chrysotile asbestos onto Annex III of the Rotterdam Convention. The meeting unanimously called for the listing of chrysotile onto Annex III in the COP 9 2019 conference. The meeting also demanded the reform of the Convention itself during the COP 9, to allow listing of a chemicals in future, with a 75% majority of member countries.

Madam Bui Thi An, outlined the principles used in establishment of the road map for banning asbestos in Vietnam. The Vietnam model sets a precedent for the rest of the region as Vietnam ban networks have been very consistent in engaging in relevant government bodies and using the media to counteract the misinformation by the asbestos lobby and asbestos industry representatives.

The meeting heard of the availability of price competitive high quality substitutes for all asbestos containing products, which can be replicated across Asia. This includes technology for non-asbestos roof sheet in Vietnam. The availability of substitutes will be encouraged based on governments signaling decision to ban, as industry can then transition. The meeting heard there has been no negative impact on any of the more than 60 countries that have banned already on their economy or GDP.

The meeting and training sessions was supported by ABAN, Union Aid Abroad APHEDA, IBAS, BWI, Solidar Suisse, AMRC and the Australian government via the Asbestos Safety Eradication Agency and DFAT.

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