

THAILAND BAN ASBESTOS NETWORK (T-BAN)

Press Release

Thailand's Ministry of Health Informs T-BAN of Support for Asbestos Ban

Bangkok January 31, 2014: Yesterday (January 30, 2014), Mrs. Somboon Sreekumdokkhae, the T-BAN coordinator, and 50 members of the T-BAN network met with a representative of the Ministry of Health (MoPH) to discuss the MoPH Asbestos Report.

Recently, Dr. Chanwit Tharatep, Chair of the Working Committee on Asbestos, reported that there was no evidence in Thailand that would justify the government banning asbestos. He said that the risk from asbestos was similar to that from other materials and there are no bans on smoking or eating fried pork.

T-BAN recently requested that Dr. Chanwit make the asbestos report public; he did not do so. Several members in the Asbestos Working Committee complained about the conclusion of the report which was not, they said, reflective of the discussions at the committee's meeting. It seems that the ban on asbestos may have become a political football rather than a health issue as Dr. Chanwit appears to follow the Minister's political policy despite the fact that his decision conflicts with scientific evidence such as that in the asbestos case.

T-BAN was told yesterday that Dr. Chanwit has been removed from his position as the Chair of the Working Committee on Asbestos. A representative of the MoPH has informed T-BAN that Dr. Narong Sahamethapat, who is the Permanent Secretary of the MoPH, is the new Chair of the Committee on Asbestos. Dr. Sahamethapat had recently had a meeting which concluded that the MoPH will follow the government cabinet's approval of the resolution for an asbestos free society. The resolution endorsed an asbestos ban and several other measures to control and minimize the asbestos risk.

T-BAN's Mrs. Somboon requested official documentation about the decision to support the government approval on the asbestos ban from Dr. Narong Sahamethapat, Permanent Secretary of the MoPH, as the new Chair of the Committee on Asbestos and asked for an urgent meeting with him. She also proposed that all sectors that agree on the asbestos ban including MoPH and T-Ban should come together to inform the public about the agreement to work together for a Thailand free of asbestos.