

Indonesia Mobilization on Asbestos

By Dimu Pratama

September proved to be a productive month for the ban asbestos movement in Indonesia. There were a number of programs and activities initiated by LION (Local Initiative for OSH Rights and Social Network), as well as other institutions in the INA-BAN network, concerned with addressing asbestos problems. Below we describe our experiences in raising asbestos awareness and dealing with the results of asbestos use in Indonesia.

The danger of asbestos campaign at the Gasibu Bandung Sunday Market, September 16th 2012



As part of our campaign to alert society to the dangers of asbestos, INA-BAN and LION have been involved in a number of joint activities in Bandung. In particular, they have campaigned during car free days (CFDs) in Dago, Bandung.

After conducting asbestos awareness campaigns on CFDs in the Dago area of Bandung, it became clear that many people were not aware of the danger that asbestos presented to their health. Consequently, we felt the need to take our campaign to other public places, beyond the CFD zone.

We chose the Gasibu Sunday Morning Market as a suitable place to widen the campaign for public awareness of asbestos hazards. The market is located in the middle of Bandung and only operates on the one day a week. It is not far from Dago and adjacent to the historic Gedung Sate building. Each week thousands of citizens gather there – to shop or on family outings.



On Sunday morning, from around 8 a.m. until noon, seven INA-BAN members toured the market socializing with the visitors; telling them that there were serious dangers associated with the use of asbestos. The flyers that we handed out gave more information on the dangers of asbestos and offered advice on how asbestos could be removed safely. The community response to this message was so enthusiastic that it took the team more than 4 hours to get round the market. The high interest shown could be due to the fact that Gasibu visitors are mostly from middle class areas, where many dwellings have asbestos-cement roofs.

In the market we also met students fund-raising for campus activities. With a wider knowledge of the outside world and open minds they seemed more willing to accept our warnings about threats to their health than the general population.



We found the experience of conducting a campaign in the middle of a community, such as we found at the market, very useful. Experience in the field like this is very valuable, but it is sometimes hard to quantify in a report. However, responses from the public in this campaign have already served as points of reference and inspiration for refining future action plans to confront the asbestos hazard in Indonesia.

Our campaign in Bandung showed, once again, that most of the population do not know about the dangers of asbestos. This means that INA-BAN needs to promote its asbestos awareness message continuously. Our commitment to the Bandung CFD campaign still leaves space in our schedule to widen our activities, so we intend to take our campaign to other cities. There are plans to campaign in the CFD zones in Jakarta and Malioboro Yogyakarta, which hopefully will be realised in the near future.

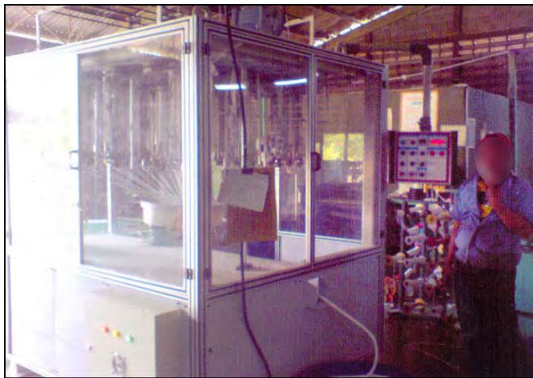


Organizing Asbestosis Victims

September 2nd 2012

On Sunday, September 2nd 2012, a LION delegation visited Cibinong, to meet with some of the employees of PT. Trigraha, a company that produces asbestos textiles. Several years ago, LION began to organize PT Trigraha employees, believing that they were in danger of contracting asbestosis, due to daily exposure to asbestos in their workplace.

Last year, LION arranged medical examinations for five PT Trigraha employees (who we will describe as Mr. N, Mrs. S, Mrs. A, Mrs. D and Mrs. Y). Subsequently, records of CT scans of the workers and some dust samples were sent to Mr. Yeyong Choi and Prof. Domyung Paek in Korea, where they were analyzed.



Conditions of factory and workers of PT Trigraha – Cibinong

When the scans were examined by health experts in Korea they declared that three of the five workers had early asbestosis; on the arrival of these results earlier this year LION immediately conveyed the news to the affected workers in Cibinong.

Although it was not easy to be the bearer of such bad news, we felt it was in the workers' interest to be told without delay. The first person we visited was Mrs. S. On hearing of the diagnosis of asbestosis the shock was evident on her face. She was also very surprised, because she had been told on the basis of tests carried out earlier in Indonesia that she was suffering from bronchitis. Not a person to be discouraged, Mrs. S expressed a determination to recover and to take all measures to fight for her rights.

Afterwards, Mrs. S took us to Mrs. A's home so we could tell her directly of her diagnosis. She also expressed surprise; then fell silent for a few minutes, unsure of how to respond to the news. Mrs. S directly recalls saying "we will figure it out, we must heal again," to which Mrs. A responded: "yes I do not want to get sick, and we will continue this struggle." At this point we described what could be done immediately to advance their cases, and possible future developments. We were unable to meet Mrs. D that day, so entrusted the two women we had seen to pass on the news of her condition.

The following Monday LION had a meeting with officers of the West Java–Banten (Jabar–Banten) region Social Security (Jamsostek) department: head of regional operations and high-level personnel from the Bandung head office. The hearing went quite well, and we received a positive reception. The department agreed to accept claims of illness due to asbestos, provided the claimant was able to satisfy certain requirements, including the submission of results of a CT scan and diagnosis of an asbestos-related disease by an Indonesian doctor.



The LION team talking about asbestos victims during the meeting at the Jabar–Banten regional Social Security Office, Bandung

For cases that are being handled by LION, Jamsostek will provide recommendations from one occupational disease expert doctor, which also focus on the asbestosis issue. And from the Operational Chairman of Jamsostek as well as their Experts in regional Jabar-Banten,

recommended that Branch office could involved LION in any training that will held later in all Jamsostek Branch on Jabar-Banten.



Participants at the meeting at the Jabar-Banten regional Social Security Office, Bandung

LION is aware that swift action is required in dealing with their current cases for, principally, two reasons. Firstly, the three victims in Cibinong are approaching retirement, so it is essential that their status be clarified quickly, before they retire. Secondly, there are rumors of closure of the PT. Trigraha plant; it seems likely it will be closed by the end of the year. This makes it a matter of urgency that advocacy be immediately found for injured workers.

On 26 September 2012, LION returned to visit asbestosis victims in Cibinong, to establish an ongoing dialogue. We met with Mrs. S, Mrs. A, Mr. N, and Mrs. Y, from the group of workers

we had organized two years earlier. This time we able to talk to the victims in more detail, particularly Mrs. A. She told us that she had been experiencing pain and a cough for about three months; in fact since getting the news of her asbestosis diagnoses the cough had not left her, so she had gone to the hospital for further check-ups.

On her last examination, the hospital confirmed that Mrs. A was suffering from a lung disease, though the disease was not specified. Two weeks before our visit Mrs A had started to take medicines for her disease; she had been prescribed three tablets a day to be taken for up to six months. She told us how bad the cough was and of the pain in her rib cage. Meanwhile, we learned that the others – Mrs. S, Mrs. D, Mrs. Y and Mr. N – hadn't been able to go for hospital check-ups because of changes in their shift schedules inside the factory.

Foremost in our campaign to get asbestos banned in Indonesia is locating victims of asbestos diseases – primarily asbestosis – and offering them continued support. Once aware of their condition, the victims can organize and their voices be heard, as has happened in other countries.

In addition, LION continues to enlist the support of doctors concerned about asbestos-related diseases because of their work in the field. This is particularly important, since only doctors have the legitimacy to diagnose diseases such as asbestosis. Similarly, we are establishing contacts with medical students and their organization AMSA (Asean Medical Student's Activities), based in Jogjakarta.