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PRESS RELEASE

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UK Toxic Asbestos Imports from China?

This month, a scandal has erupted in Australia concerning the use of illegally imported asbestos-containing building materials from China. The latest incident was exposed thanks to a trade union representative who suspected that roofing panels at the site of a new children's hospital in Perth, Western Australia might contain chrysotile (white) asbestos; tests confirmed his suspicions.¹ Since this incident, enquiries have documented the possibility of similar contamination at scores of other construction projects around Australia.

On July 19, 2016, personnel from the Australian Border Force raided the headquarters of the Chinese-owned company which imported this banned material: Yuanda Australia PTY Ltd. Emergency measures have been put in place to impound Yuanda imports at the docks until they have been tested for asbestos.²

The intense level of media scrutiny, trade union agitation and public outrage are understandable. Exposures to asbestos are responsible for Australia's most deadly epidemic of occupational disease. In fact, the relatively small population of Australia has one of the world's highest incidences of the fatal asbestos cancer mesothelioma. Unfortunately, the UK has, for years, had the world's highest incidence of mesothelioma mortality. In July 2016, the Health and Safety Executive reported that: "Men who worked in the building industry when asbestos was used extensively are now among those most at risk of mesothelioma."³

If Yuanda Australia imported asbestos-containing building materials, it is not unreasonable to suspect that Yuanda UK Co. Ltd could have done likewise. The company's website boasts of several high-profile UK projects including: 100 Bishopsgate (completion 2018), Newington Butts (2017), Nova Victoria (2017), One Blackfriars Road (2017), Indescon Court 2 (2016) and others.⁴ Are toxic Yuanda products such as those used on the new children's hospital in Perth, Western Australia also being used on the London sites?

Commenting on the situation, Fiona Murie, Director of Health and Safety and Construction for the Building and Woodworkers International, said:

"The authorities in Australia have been complacent regarding the threat posed by the import of illegal building materials from China, the world's second largest asbestos user. Our organization is extremely concerned about the welfare of building workers in the UK

¹ *Asbestos Diseases Hit Home*. July 21, 2016.

<https://au.news.yahoo.com/thewest/wa/a/32104079/asbestos-diseases-hit-home/#page1>

² *Customs' asbestos checks strand China products at border*. July 20, 2016.

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/business/customs-asbestos-checks-strand-china-products-at-border/news-story/e023ad4e41c4bc162a2684e5f45f0cd8>

³ HSE. *Mesothelioma in Great Britain*. July 2016.

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/research/rrhtm/rr696.htm>

⁴ Yuanda Europe's Project Gallery.

<http://www.yuanda-europe.com/projects>

and other countries where Yuanda is active. Until the situation has been resolved, we urge national and regional authorities responsible for enforcing asbestos prohibitions to take every appropriate action to prevent asbestos-containing products from China entering the country.”

Echoing Ms. Murie sentiments, Graham Dring, Chair of the Asbestos Victims Support Groups Forum, UK, said:

“The precautionary principle dictates that if there is a suspected risk of causing harm to the public or the environment, then alternative measures or products should be used. Up to 5,000 people are dying every year in the UK from asbestos-related diseases. The UK’s asbestos ban, adopted more than 15 years ago, is completely undermined if no one is inspecting shipments to ascertain whether or not they contain asbestos.”

The groups which have issued this press release are pursuing urgent enquiries with Yuanda UK Co. Ltd., the City of London Trading Standards, the Parliamentary Asbestos Sub-Group and other stakeholder organizations.

According to Laurie Kazan-Allen, of the International Ban Asbestos Secretariat, attempts in 2015 to raise concerns over asbestos-containing imports were dismissed by UK authorities.⁵

“Considering the scale and ubiquity of the Australian contamination and the fact that the company allegedly responsible for the illegal asbestos imports is also active in the UK, workers, consumers and members of the public should communicate concerns to their MPs, employers and networks by every means possible in order to ensure that this situation is resolved at the earliest possible opportunity. Any exposure to asbestos could prove fatal.”

Note for Editors

For further information, please contact IBAS Coordinator Laurie Kazan-Allen, email: lka@btinternet.com or Graham Dring from the Asbestos Victims’ Support Groups Forum UK: 0161 636 7555

⁵ Press Release. *STOP Playing with Cancer*. July 27, 2015
<http://ibasecretariat.org/media-release-stop-playing-with-cancer-uk-july-27-2015.pdf>