

ASBESTOS UPDATE

Special International Edition

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THE INTERNATIONAL SITUATION A GENERAL OVERVIEW

Whereas asbestos materials have been used for over a Millenium, mounting evidence linking respiratory diseases to environmental and occupational exposure to asbestos fibres, has led to diminishing demand for the asbestos product. In the “developed” countries asbestos products are either banned or seriously restricted. Requirements for handling, use and disposal of asbestos are reinforced by compensation schemes and a framework for legal claims through litigation. The ban asbestos movement has been so successful in these “developed” countries that large U.S.A. asbestos deposits remain unexploited

In the year 2000 Canada, the second biggest producer of asbestos after the Commonwealth of Independent States (C.I.S.), is the only “developed” country that produces (almost entirely for export) significant quantities of Asbestos. It produces approximately 18% of the world’s Chrysotile (Virta 1999) Another 74% comes from four developing countries, China, Brazil, Zimbabwe, and Kazhakstan. Totalling 38% along with C.I.S. 36%.

The success of the ban asbestos Lobby is considered to be a major reason for the marked decline in global asbestos production.

South Africa has a major asbestos pollution problem that was recently challenged through court action. While on the other hand China, Brazil and the C.I.S. have developed significant markets for their asbestos.

Contrastingly “developing countries such as Thailand, India, and South Korea have now become major importers of asbestos.

An emerging picture is that serious mining, manufacturing and processing is flourishing in “developing” nations while in “developed” countries such as Britain and the European community intense public pressure is being applied to cease activity altogether. But while the use of asbestos in “developing” countries is increasing, information about effects on health is limited . With a regime of misunderstood health effects of asbestos use in developing countries, promotion of the asbestos product by big business and those trying to escape their responsibilities for bad asbestos handling practices flourishes unchallenged.

The principle that must be maintained here is that “The Polluter Pays”, even though the polluter may have migrated to other countries. Victims in South Africa were successful in taking Cape p.l.c. to the U.K. courts and received a



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settlement of sorts. Encouraged by this success 450 victims from Swaziland have sought compensation from an asbestos firm that left Swaziland in the 1980's (Coakley 2000)

In this regard the globalisation of asbestos litigation is a welcome development for the victims of asbestos-related disease in developing countries, especially where multi-national companies are traceable to their home base anywhere in the world.

The Clydebank Asbestos Group fights for justice for asbestos sufferers mainly through the British Legal and Social Security compensation systems, coupled with work through the Labour and Trades Union movement.

It is essential for us to be converse with the struggle to eradicate the use of asbestos right across the globe and lend our support to that struggle wherever possible.

CANADIAN CHRYSOTILE : A GLOBAL CONCERN

In September 2003 the first independent conference against asbestos was held in Canada, a country which hosts the worldwide chrysotile lobby.

With the strongest support from the Canadian establishment, the industry suppressed public debate on asbestos, made sure that Canadian asbestos victims were not heard and created mountains of asbestos tailings which remain untreated and unsecured to this day.

Placard carrying workers protested outside the conference, while inside, Canadian speakers revealed a national scandal long denied by both the industry and the government. Representatives from Peru, the Lebanon and India described the appalling human tragedies initiated by the use of chrysotile in their countries. Canadian scientists, epidemiologists, academics, medical personnel, trade unionists and public health experts exposed the ways in which the industry has countered the increasing mass of evidence about the hazards of asbestos.

Speakers from various countries detailed an almost universal absence of health and safety regulations in developing countries which ensures that the use of Chrysotile will continue to constitute a serious ongoing risk to public health.

The industry's control of the Canadian asbestos agenda will end. Canadian controllers of the pro-chrysotile lobby will become less able to operate in the wider global arena ; this will reveal to remaining exporters the growing hostility of consumers and governments opposed to the use of asbestos.

ON THE SOUTH AFRICAN ASBESTOS TRAIL

Recently the Clydebank Asbestos Group was asked to take part in a T.V.documentary. As a result group member **Joan Baird** was commissioned to travel to South Africa to witness what was happening there first hand, this was Joan's story

Early this year I was asked to take part in a documentary film for ITV on Asbestos. This was to be seen through the eyes of two widows who had lost their husbands to mesothelioma, the most dreaded of the asbestos related diseases. Mesothelioma a hellish, horrendous death.

Pauline Bonney from Eastbourne, Sussex and myself were willing, as this was an opportunity to highlight the ongoing problems on all asbestos issues. Pauline's husband John, died four and half years ago, aged 51. John was an electrician employed by the BBC. My husband Willie died seven years ago aged 75, he was a welding inspector and had been for eleven years retired prior to his death.

Here you have the common ground. The two of us from very different backgrounds, age and geographically. Pauline from a seaside town, myself from the highly industrial area. Unfortunately, young Pauline has not had the help of a local support group, she is still hurting at the loss of John, but her gut determination made her set up her own group. I was by far more fortunate to have the support before and after my husband Willie's death from the Clydebank Asbestos Group. I am a volunteer worker with them and have become an activist on all matters relating to Asbestos.

The film is titled, "You Shall Know Them By Trail of Death", this name could change before final editing.

All I know at present is that viewing will be shown either before Christmas or early New Year. The programme is approx., 1 hour long and will be shown on ITV.

Filming started in July. Pauline, filming in England and myself in Scotland, then both of us out in South Africa following the trail of the main source of imported asbestos into this country. It was appalling to see how disused mines were left and the employees kept in ignorance to the dangers of this silent deadly dust, asbestos. The anger within me at what I witnessed in South Africa, will never be forgotten. The well known facts of Pollution!! Poverty!! Politics!!! The cream skimmed for the fat cats at the expense of impoverished peoples. The World Environmental Movement will have to address the asbestos question. South Africa is only one part, what about Australia, Japan and third world countries? Sadly, in decades to come, I foresee worldwide catastrophe. So we will fight on for justice. The worldwide ban of asbestos, the removal of asbestos from industrial, domestic properties and the environmental clean up of disused mining sites and dumps.

This film will help to keep the asbestos question high profile.

Joan Baird.

"It was appalling to see how disused mines were left and the employees kept in ignorance to the dangers of this silent deadly dust"

The Clydebank Asbestos Group committee members are as follows....

Secretary

Margaret Lilly

Chair

Sam Irvine

Vice Chair

Robert Dickie

Treasurer

Joseph O'Neill

- Jimmy Cloughley
- David Colrairie
- Joan Baird
- Charlie Marshall
- Hope Robertson

Monitoring Officers

- Tom Gorman
- John Hepburn

Administrator

- Janice Strain

Asbestos Advice Counsellor

- Alex Cunningham

"The World Environmental Movement will have to address the asbestos question"

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The Global Asbestos Conference 2004 is to take place in Tokyo in 2004. The organisers consist of the Local Organising Committee along with the International Congress Committee as well as International Sponsoring and Supporting bodies. The purpose of the Conference is to examine how to prevent and minimise asbestos risks, humans and environment in a National and Global context. The Congress will also explore means addressing the emerging health effects and dealing with asbestos installed in our society. The Tokyo Congress is hoped to bring a new impetus to our global action to tackle on-going asbestos risks. The topics being discussed at the conference will include...

Plenary Sessions

1. Global Health Impact of Asbestos : urgent action is needed.
2. Environmental exposure, crisis preparedness and risk communication.
3. Empowerment of Victims and their families.
4. Medical Aspects : surveillance and treatment of asbestos related diseases.
5. Compensation for damages due to asbestos
6. Identification, management and the removal of existing asbestos.
7. A world free from asbestos risks : A future strategy.

Workshops

There will be many workshops including, Epidemiology and public health ; Asbestos and Shipyards ; Asbestos and Construction ; Trade Union initiative and asbestos litigation. It all adds up to a very interesting conference.

“Global Asbestos
Conference
Tokyo 2004”

We're on the web
www.clydebankasbestos.org.uk

Clydebank
Asbestos Group
say “send the
ghost ships home”


Clydebank Asbestos
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Clydebank Asbestos Group say “send Ghost Ships Home Immediately”

The Clydebank Asbestos Group will be supporting Hartlepool Council and campaigning to send the American ships that are filled with toxic materials such as asbestos, back to their place of origin. We want these ships sent back immediately. We don't want them stored up for the winter because when the winter is over, the ships will be older and less seaworthy. This may then be used as an excuse to dismantle them here. We have lost enough of our citizens through asbestos pollution.

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