



Mesothelioma Articles

Canadian Asbestos Industry: Exporting Human Misery

by Pat Martin Member of Parliament, Winnipeg Centre, Canada

Canada is a progressive, modern western democracy with an admirable commitment to equality, human rights and social justice. Having said that, I hang my head in shame that Canada continues to be one of the world's leading producers and exporters of asbestos - the greatest industrial hazard the world has ever known. Sadly, the Government of Canada remains directly involved with promoting and marketing this deadly material around the world. While much of the rest of the developed world is banning asbestos in all its forms, Canada is busy exporting over 220,000 tonnes per year (2004) into under-developed countries. In some cases, these countries have health and safety regulations that are non-existent or not enforced. This exposes millions of illinformed and unsuspecting people to the deadly hazards of asbestos. Without exaggeration, we are exporting human misery. And doing so with an aggressive marketing strategy endorsed by the Government of Canada - otherwise a country with a pretty well-deserved reputation for ethics, compassion, and decency. They hope people will say: "If a nice country like Canada says it's OK, then it must be ok." But it is not ok. Most Canadians would be horrified to learn what an international pariah we are where asbestos is concerned.

Canada not only refuses to ban asbestos the way Australia, Japan, and all the countries of the European Union have done, but instead it sends teams of Department of Justice lawyers around the world at great expense to prevent other countries from doing so. It uses its influence to twist arms to oppose international conventions restricting asbestos use, and it uses Canadian Consulates to host marketing junkets by the asbestos industry (120 times in 60 countries!) It has even been exposed in the media for pressuring importing countries to not put hazardous material warnings on the packaging of Canadian asbestos in Thailand and South Korea and probably elsewhere. Canadian government officials have taken on the role of globe-trotting, asbestos industry propagandists. It is reprehensible that the asbestos industry has been allowed to trade on our credibility as a nation.

Decades of asbestos mining continues to take a heavy toll on Canadians' health. In fact, according to a June 2005 study by the Quebec National Institute of Public Health, men in that region have the fourth highest rate of [mesothelioma](#) in the world. Women there have the highest rates. Concerned Canadians are asking the Canadian government to ban asbestos in all its forms. We want them to shut down the mines and provide early retirement and transition measures to affected workers. We are asking the Government of Canada to undertake a comprehensive testing and removal program to eradicate asbestos-laden products from private and public places. We are demanding heavy investment in medical research for better diagnostics and treatment of mesothelioma and asbestos related diseases - so that Canada can export solutions to asbestos exposure, instead of just the causes.

Canadian government officials have taken on the role of globe-trotting, asbestos industry propagandists.

Given these facts, and as a Canadian Member of Parliament, I believe that my government has a moral obligation to stop opposing the inclusion of asbestos in the Rotterdam Convention. In fact, I believe strongly that the Canadian government should be campaigning in favour of informed prior consent and the use of the precautionary principle when it comes to the handling of dangerous materials like asbestos. Concerned Canadians must continue to tell the truth and expose the Canadian asbestos industry. Canada must share in the collective responsibility for this human health tragedy.

Source: Chrysotile asbestos: Hazardous to Humans, Deadly to the Rotterdam Convention, Published by Building & Woodworkers International and the International Ban Asbestos Secretariat.