



Mesothelioma Articles

India's Position on Chrysotile Asbestos Dictated by Vested Interests!

by Gopal Krishna, Coordinator Ban Asbestos Network of India (BANI)

Although the Supreme Court of India has ruled that the Government of India must comply with International Labour Organization (ILO) resolutions, our Government has chosen to ignore the ILO resolution (June 14, 2006) stating "the elimination of the future use of asbestos and the identification and proper management of asbestos currently in place are the most effective means to protect workers from asbestos exposures and to prevent future asbestos-related disease and deaths." For a veteran observer of India's official policy on chrysotile, this is not a surprise. When the inclusion of chrysotile on the PIC list was initially proposed, it was blocked by India along with other asbestos stakeholders, led by Canada. Full prior disclosure of all the risks from this killer fiber is an ethical, legal and humanitarian necessity; therefore, the PIC listing of chrysotile should be approved as a matter of utmost urgency at COP3 in October 2006.

Ban Asbestos Network of India (BANIL) an alliance of scientists, doctors, public health researchers, trade unions, activists and civil society groups, condemns the Government's continued pro-industry bias and lack of concern for the asbestos-injured. On August 18, 2003, the Union Minister of Health and Family Welfare and Parliamentary Affairs, Mrs Sushma SwaraL told the Indian Parliament that: "Studies by the National Institute of Occupational Health (NIOH), Ahmedabad, have shown that longterm exposure to any type of asbestos can lead to development of [asbestosis](#), lung cancer and [mesothelioma](#)." This was not the first official acknowledgment of the asbestos hazard. Office Memorandum NO.6 (6)/94 - Cement, (Sept 1, 1994) of the Ministry of Industry states:

"The Department has generally not been recommending any case of Industrial License to any new unit for the creation of fresh capacity of asbestos products in the recent past due to the apprehension that prolonged exposure to asbestos leads to serious health hazards,"

India is expanding the asbestos sector and constructing factories where asbestos material is produced 24 hours a day.

In light of these statements and the new positions taken by the ILO and World Health Organization regarding the urgent need to eliminate asbestos use, the Government should be initiating a range of measures to protect the population from the asbestos hazard. That it is not doing so demonstrates the parasitic relationship which exists between politicians eager for campaign contributions and industry shareholders greedy for profits. Even after Sonia Gandhi's electoral victory, which was achieved under the slogan: Aam Aadmi (ordinary people), her Government's pro-chrysotile bias was undiminished. Recently, permission was granted for the construction of a huge asbestos-cement plant in Mrs. Gandhi's constituency in Raebareilly, Uttar Pradesh. While other countries are banning asbestos, India is expanding the asbestos sector and constructing factories where asbestos material is produced 24 hours a day. It is public knowledge that the Deputy Leader of the Indian National Congress in the Lower House of Parliament owns asbestos factories. To increase national demand for asbestos products, the Government has taken the perverse step of lowering import duties on chrysotile, much of which comes from Canada. Although non-asbestos technology certainly exists in India, in fact in some factories the two technologies exist side-by-side, consumers will inevitably opt for the cheaper product: more demand will translate into higher sales which will generate more chrysotile rupees that can be used to obtain an even higher level of political support. As the quid-pro-quo relationship between Government officials and asbestos businessmen exists outside the media spotlight, journalists and the public remain unaware of the pernicious reasons which motivate the decisions being taken; decisions which will expose current and future generations to the deadly asbestos hazard.

BANI, the Occupational and Environmental Health Network of India (OEHNI), civil society groups, trade unions and human rights groups have demanded an immediate ban on all uses of asbestos including an immediate end to the import of chrysotile. Other measures to identify, compensate and treat the asbestos-injured and regulations to minimize harmful exposures are also being proposed. BANI demands the criminal prosecution of those responsible for asbestos exposures such as factory owners and company directors. Asbestos is a public health issue which the Government has ignored for far too long. In the public interest, BANI

appeals to the Government of India to support the inclusion of chrysotile asbestos on a trade "watch list" that already contains all other forms of asbestos.

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

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