

The Global Asbestos Struggle in 2006

Over 90% of world asbestos use in Asbestos-Cement pipe, flat sheet, and corrugated roofing sheet. Most of the rest is used in brake pads, also quite dangerous and uncontrollable in poor countries.

“Controlled Use” of asbestos rejected by World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001, in upholding national asbestos bans.

Canada remains **the** major obstacle to progress on asbestos:

- criticized by Fellows Soskolne and Bates over meddling in Indonesia.
- Canada also threatened South Africa with WTO action this year.
- Rotterdam Convention threatened by Canada et al. over including asbestos

About 40 countries with national asbestos bans, the latest to announce:
S. Korea and S. Africa.

But even with bans and restrictions, global asbestos use still over 2,000,000 t/y since 2000. (All-time high was 5 million tons in 1975.)

Asbestos use increasing 9%/yr in India, also increasing in China and other countries.

No more multinational asbestos corporations remain, only national enterprises remain.

Corrupt relations with government and media ownership ensure their profitability, through avoidance of costs of prevention and compensation.

They are very threatening to health professionals (TK Joshi, Fernanda Giannasi).

ILO resolution in June 2006 supported national asbestos bans for the first time.

WHO published a position paper in 2006 and has embarked on an asbestos action program, starting with joint meetings with ILO in Vietnam.

World Bank challenged to do more on asbestos, is drafting a guidance note on asbestos for project loan officers (Best-Practice Standards for World Bank-Supported Projects). Document stresses use of safer building materials and safeguards in work with existing asbestos containing materials in structures.

Int'l devel. banks moving against asbestos in new building and industrial projects

- World Bank – Ukraine schools (no new asbestos roofing, care in replacing old roofs)
- International Finance Corp. – China non-asbestos brake plant financed 2005

Efforts to ban asbestos, regulate exposure, and obtain compensation for workers disabled by asbestos are coordinated by the International Ban Asbestos Secretariat (IBAS) in London. IBAS organizes international conferences (e.g., July 2006, Bangkok) to gather government officials, scientists, doctors, lawyers, unionists, politicians, journalists, etc. www.ibas.btinternet.co.uk

Overall, it is disappointing that global use persists at half the historic levels of the 1970s and 1980s, with a possible toll in the millions of preventable deaths not prevented.

Most of the people in the world still live in countries where asbestos is used under poorly controlled conditions.

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