

Global Overview: Asbestos Landscape 2018

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Wherever asbestos has been mined, processed, used or sold, vested interests have profited; unfortunately even now, money is still being made from the global trade in this deadly substance. As asbestos pushers enjoy their ill-gotten gains, ordinary human beings pay the price for deadly asbestos exposures at work, at home or in school. Latest statistics suggest that annual global asbestos mortality could exceed 300,000; this is equivalent to wiping out a city the size of Cordoba, Spain, Cincinnati, US or Canberra, Australia every year.¹

In the early 20th century, asbestos was called the “magic mineral;” having caused a pandemic of debilitating disease and premature deaths, it is now more commonly referred to as the “killer fiber.” In many industrialized countries, asbestos removal is a growth industry and extreme measures are mandated for dealing with the legacy of widespread and uncontrolled use. Elsewhere, asbestos is still regarded as just another raw material with few, if any regulations, to protect workers, members of the public, consumers or others from toxic exposures.

As of today, 66 countries have outlawed the use of asbestos; of the remaining 129 countries, the majority (~80%) do NOT use asbestos.² According to the latest (provisional) asbestos trade data in 2016:

- four countries produced asbestos: Russia (645,000 tonnes/t), China (400,000t), Brazil (300,000t), and Kazakhstan (192,500t);
- only 28 countries (~35%) consumed over 500t/year; of these, only four used over 100,000t/year; China (488,414t) India (307,981t), Brazil (219,900t) and Indonesia (114,481t);³
- the majority of asbestos consumption (~90%) takes place in Asian countries;
- India is the world’s biggest asbestos importer having used on average ~327,000t per year between 2013 and 2016.⁴

The good news is that between 2012 and 2016 there was a 27% fall in global asbestos production from ~2.1 million tonnes to ~1.54 million tonnes.⁵ Although Brazil is still mining asbestos, a Supreme Court decision issued in November 2017 deemed the asbestos trade unconstitutional; as a result, a Brazilian director of the International Chrysotile Association (ICA) – the asbestos industry’s lobbying group – resigned his position.⁶ From the glory days of yesteryear, the ICA is now funded by just two asbestos mining countries – Russia and Kazakhstan – and two asbestos selling countries – India and Mexico.

¹ Takala J. et al. *Comparative Analysis of the Burden of Injury and Illness at Work in Selected Countries and Regions*. June 2017. Central European Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine
http://www.omfi.hu/cejoem/Volume23/Vol23No1-2/23_1-2_Article_01.pdf

² *Current Asbestos Bans*. October 23, 2018.
http://ibasecretariat.org/alpha_ban_list.php

³ According to provisional USGS data, in 2016 Russia consumed 54,252t of asbestos.

⁴ This data is sourced from the United States Geological Survey (USGS).

⁵ Allen D, Kazan-Allen L. *Dramatic Fall in Asbestos Production*. May 3, 2018.
<http://ibasecretariat.org/da-lka-dramatic-fall-in-asbestos-production.php>

⁶ Ruff K. *International asbestos lobby loses another member*. October 11, 2018.
<https://rightoncanada.ca/?p=4290>

The publication on October 1, 2018 of Canadian prohibitions on the import, sale, use and manufacture of asbestos marked a seismic shift in the global asbestos debate.⁷ When even the world's foremost asbestos producer and global champion takes action to end deadly exposures, it is clear that the asbestos industry is in terminal decline.

21st Century Asbestos Challenges: UK & India

United Kingdom

The dimension and scale of the challenges posed by asbestos vary from country to country. The UK, which banned asbestos in 1999, used 7 million tonnes of asbestos – of which 2% was crocidolite, 8% amosite and 90% chrysotile – during the 20th century,⁸ as a result of which the country has the world's highest incidence of mesothelioma mortality,⁹ the signature cancer associated with asbestos exposure. Nearly, three times as many Britons die from asbestos-related diseases as from road traffic accidents.¹⁰ Buckingham Palace, the Palace of Westminster, the vast majority of our schools and hospitals are contaminated with asbestos putting our head of state, politicians, civil servants, schoolchildren, teachers, hospital staff and patients at daily risk of asbestos exposures. With an incompetent government and severe financial constraints on public services, it is unlikely that any of this will be fixed soon.

The improvements that have been made to the plight of UK asbestos victims have been brought about as a result of unrelenting lobbying by asbestos victims' groups, non-governmental organizations, mesothelioma charities, trade unions, medical associations, health and safety campaigners, politicians and others. Taken collectively these bodies have:

- revolutionized the public perception of asbestos by raising awareness that the only safe exposure to asbestos is no exposure;
- exposed faulty regulations which perpetuated the asbestos epidemic such as the continuing use of asbestos and achieved a national ban in 1999;
- redefined the discussion about asbestos from a historical issue affecting retired working class men to a matter of public health affecting everyone;

⁷ *Prohibition of Asbestos and Products Containing Asbestos Regulations: SOR/2018-196*. October 1, 2018. <http://www.gazette.gc.ca/rp-pr/p2/2018/2018-10-17/html/sor-dors196-eng.html>

⁸ Kazan-Allen L. *Asbestos in the UK: Then and Now*. Issue 93 British Asbestos Newsletter. Winter 2013-14. <http://www.britishasbestosnewsletter.org/ban93.htm>

⁹ Peto J, et al. *Occupational, domestic and environmental mesothelioma risks in Britain: A case-control study*. 2009.

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/research/rrpdf/rr696.pdf>

Delgermaa V, Takahashi K. et al. *Global mesothelioma deaths reported to the World Health Organization between 1994 and 2008*. Bulletin World Health Organization

2011. <http://www.who.int/bulletin/volumes/89/10/11-086678/en/>

GBD Risk Factors Collaborators. *Global, regional, and national comparative risk assessment of 84 behavioural, environmental and occupational, and metabolic risks or clusters of risks, 1990–2016: a systematic analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study 2016*. September 16, 2017.

[http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(17\)32366-8/abstract](http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(17)32366-8/abstract)

¹⁰ Using online data retrieved from the Health and Safety Executive website, it was calculated that asbestos-related deaths in 2013 could reach 5,000 [this does not include deaths from cancers of the larynx or ovary]. In 2013, there were 1,730 road accident fatalities.

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/255125/road-accidents-and-safety-quarterly-estimates-q2-2013.pdf

- visualized the plight of victims by bringing asbestos-related issues into the mainstream media, local press and academic journals and making sure these issues achieved a high priority on the country's political and medical agendas;
- initiated and implemented annual Action Mesothelioma Days as educational and networking events for grassroots groups around the country.
- identified unfairness and mistreatment in government schemes for diagnosing and compensating victims and worked to improve social security and medical protocols;
- highlighted legal loopholes and time-consuming procedures which led to many victims dying before their legal cases were resolved;
- investigated, publicized and acted on financial manoeuvres which would disadvantage asbestos claimants;
- campaigned for preventive measures for constructions workers, electricians, plumbers and others working in high-risk trades;
- researched asbestos contamination of schools and forced reluctant local authorities, government agencies and government ministries to acknowledge the hazardous situation.

India

India is the world's biggest asbestos importing country and asbestos lobbyists aim to keep it that way. Asbestos stakeholders have used various means to control the national asbestos debate including sham "scientific conferences," propaganda masquerading as newspaper articles, legal threats to asbestos activists, the corruption of government research and interference in United Nations negotiations to address the hazard posed by the unregulated global trade in chrysotile (white) asbestos.

From data collected by IBAS, we estimate that between 1960 and 2016, India used over eight million tonnes of asbestos¹¹ under conditions in which corporate profits were prioritized and health and safety precautions were routinely ignored. Even asbestos apologists in India will admit that in the past conditions were far from ideal; nowadays, however, they say that asbestos is being used "safely under controlled conditions." This is more wishful thinking than reality as this video, which was taken in the Everest Industries Ltd. asbestos factory in Kolkata, West Bengal on June 3, 2018 reveals.¹² Masks provided by the company (FFP2) were of no use in preventing toxic exposures in conditions where workers manually deposited raw asbestos into unsealed hoppers.¹³

¹¹ Our calculations suggest that the cumulative amount of asbestos used in India over that period was 8,400,000 tonnes.

¹² Everest Industries Ltd. is the largest asbestos manufacturing company in India.

¹³ A US asbestos specialist, responding to queries about the effectiveness of these masks for the workers at the asbestos factory, wrote:

"Respirators must be equipped with HEPA filtered cartridges (color coded purple) or an N-100, P-100 or R-100 NIOSH rating. These cartridges are specific for filtering out asbestos fibers. Paper dust masks like these and the ones available at hardware stores **do not filter out asbestos fibers and should not be used.** Half face respirators cover the nose and mouth and consist of a silicone or rubber face piece, elastic head harness and filter cartridges.

Also note that respirators provide little protection if they do not fit properly. Facial hair, especially beards and goatees, will not allow the respirator to fit properly. Further, there are very specific protocols for testing respirator fit. I have half face respirators for doing survey work or light NOA field investigations, but I would much rather have something with a higher 'respiratory protection factor' (RPF), like a full face or a PAPR (powered air-purifying respirator) if I know that there is going to be asbestos fibers released in the air. The RPF is basically the ratio between the number of fibers inside the mask to outside, e.g., ½ face respirators

In light of the blatant hazard posed by the footage just screened, how is it possible for the Government of India to retain a policy supporting asbestos use? For decades, national asbestos stakeholders used seemingly independent, non-commercial associations to create the political, economic and social conditions in which asbestos markets could flourish:

- the Asbestosis Research Council¹⁴ in the UK (1957-1990), was “an attempt to capture the scientific agenda [on asbestos] and influence public policy;”
- the Chrysotile Institute in Canada (operational from 1984 to 2012, initially as the Asbestos Institute),¹⁵ was founded to provide “technical and financial aid for the creation of a dozen national industry associations in as many countries;”¹⁶
- the aim of the Asbestos International Association (AIA) was to “promote the adoption and application of appropriate prevention and control measures, regulations, standards, work practices and techniques” for the safe use of asbestos.¹⁷
- the Portuguese Associação das Industrias de Produtos de Amianto Crisótilo (AIPA/ the Chrysotile Asbestos Products Association) was a member of the AIA; its objectives included: the organization of asbestos conferences and seminars to promote the agendas of employers and economic vested interests.¹⁸

In November 2001, the AIPA updated members of the Asbestos International Association’s Governing Council on current developments in Portugal at a secret meeting in London:

“2. Media

“Some news related with asbestos’ danger came up on the news.

All of them have been contested by AIPA. In each case, a previous contact was made with the journalist responsible for the news and afterwards a written mail was send (sic) contesting their statements.

AIPA site has been visited with a regularity that we may consider very positive. From 15 May 1997 till 1 October 2001 the number of visits was 7199.

3. Trade Unions

Nothing special to point out.

will usually provide 25-30 RPF, and the PAPR somewhere around 500. For the kind of work it sounds like those workers are doing, they should probably be in either supplied-line respirators or scuba gear, which have RPF’s in the 1,000-10,000 range. As the masks pictured don’t really filter out asbestos at all, they would have an RPF of 1.”

¹⁴ Kazan-Allen L. *The Asbestosis Research Council*. February 1, 2001.

http://ibasecretariat.org/lka_arc.php

¹⁵ Kazan-Allen, L. *The Rise and Fall of the Chrysotile Institute*. May 1, 2012.

<http://ibasecretariat.org/lka-rise-and-fall-of-chrysotile-institute.php>

¹⁶ *The Chrysotile Institute*. Date unknown.

<http://www.chrysotile.com/en/about.aspx>

¹⁷ The AIA was set up in the UK in 1976; in 1997, it AIA moved to Montreal and in 2005 changed its name to the International Chrysotile Association.

Ruff, K. *Exposé of the International Chrysotile Association*. February 18, 2013.

<https://rightoncanada.ca/?p=1862>

¹⁸ AIPA – *Chrysotile Asbestos Products Industries Association*. Date unknown.

https://translate.google.co.uk/translate?hl=en&sl=pt&u=https://www.infoempresas.com.pt/Empresa_AIPA-ASSOCIACAO-INDUSTRIAS-PRODUTOS-AMIANTO-CRISOTILO.html&prev=search

4. Contacts

Several contacts were made with the Representatives of Portuguese Affaires on Environment, Work and Economy in order to point out AIPA's position about the issues linked to waste, workers' protection and asbestos products industry.

We stress out (sic) the significant quantity of request for information about several situations presented to our Association in order to clarify asbestos-related situations.

At last, we were also consulted by "Teatro National D. Maria II" to give out opinion about a wall, in the back stage, coated with sprayed asbestos and painted with vitreous enamel. There was a movement in favour of the removal of asbestos. AIPA's opinion was against this position. We were in favour of the reinforcement of the protection of the wall. This opinion was adopted."

As we saw in the UK, Canada and Portugal, asbestos propaganda offensives were powerful weapons in ensuring that decision-makers, government officials, consumers and trade unionists retained the status quo. Things are no different in India today.

Indian asbestos stakeholders are represented by an aggressive marketing association: The Asbestos Cement Products Manufacturers Association (ACPMA), a New Delhi-based organization funded by 12 asbestos companies which vehemently asserts that the hazard posed by asbestos is "not based on any scientific evidence in India or elsewhere, and is totally dictated by vested commercial interests."¹⁹ According to the ACPMA's executive director John Nicodemus: "That lung cancer deaths have been caused by inhaling asbestos fiber has not been conclusively proved in India."²⁰

Since it was founded in 1985, the ACPMA has received \$80+ million for "promotional activities in India that revolve around advertising promotions to counter baseless allegations by Ban Asbestos Network India [and] legal and promotional activities that [are] mostly in rural India." Asbestos stakeholders have close ties to local, regional, state and federal politicians. The pro-asbestos agenda in the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh is advanced "by one of its MPs, Gaddam Vivekanand, who **reportedly** controls 25 percent of India's asbestos production through his ownership of seven factories across the country. An eighth will open this year (2020) in eastern Orissa state."

India Case Study: New Dynamics in Asbestos Struggle

Despite the almost overwhelming financial, political and economic clout of the asbestos industry, Indian campaigners are making headway in identifying asbestos victims, pursuing compensation and changing the dialogue on asbestos. On April 19, 2018, a medical diagnosis camp organized by the Worker's Initiative was held for employees from the Kolkata asbestos factory. Sixty-four workers and family members were examined by Dr. Murli, a well-known health expert. Thirty-one of those examined were diagnosed as suffering from asbestos-related conditions. In retaliation for their support of this initiative, Arun Chakraborty and

¹⁹Krishnan, M. Ray, SG. *India's wide use of asbestos brings dire warnings*. July 21, 2010. <https://www.icij.org/investigations/dangers-dust/indias-wide-use-asbestos-brings-dire-warnings/>
²⁰ In 2010, it was estimated that the ACPMA was receiving between \$8 to \$13 million per year.

Goutam Sardar – full-time workers from the Kolkata plant – were suspended by Everest on “baseless charges alleging disorderly behaviour.” The victimization of these men led to the mobilization of the workforce:

- On May 13, 2018, a “struggle Committee”²¹ was formed to support the two workers.
- On May 20, the Committee reconvened to consider strategies for achieving the reinstatement of brothers Chakraborty and Sardar.
- On June 18, a leaflet was published in Hindi and English signed by 16 senior workers from the factory which highlighted the health hazards of handling asbestos fibers and the lack of health and safety protection at the plant. At a meeting called by the plant’s personnel manager, the signatory workmen were threatened.
- Efforts to form a new independent trade union and keep the asbestos issue high on the Committee’s agenda were progressed at meetings of the Committee on July 2, July 18 and August 1.
- On August 15, Kamal Tewary was elected President of Everest Industries Ltd Permanent Employees Union and an open letter signed by senior workers was published.
- Prior to the election, three handbills were published and two gate meetings were conducted.
- On August 31, 2018, Everest workers rejected the pro-management trade union and voted to be represented by the new Everest Industries Ltd Permanent Employees Union which is supporting calls for the transition by Everest to an asbestos-free technology.²²

Commenting on the new union’s election victory, President Tewary said:

“the result of the election has advanced the ban asbestos struggle in India and in this regard, the elected union in its first Executive Committee meeting held after the declaration of election result adopted a resolution to organize all the Asbestos workers union of India and push forward the demand of abolition of asbestos fiber operations.”

Global Advances in Struggle to Eradicate the Asbestos Slaughter!

The developments at the Everest asbestos factory highlight the capacity of grassroots activists to impact on national asbestos dialogues. In recent weeks, there have been scores of other successful initiatives, meetings, medical training programs and outreach projects.

- VIETNAM: September 13 and 14, 100+ delegates from Vietnam and 10 other Asia Pacific countries met at the second annual conference of the Southeast Asia Ban Asbestos Network in Hanoi to progress plans for achieving regional asbestos prohibitions.

²¹The remit of the “struggle Committee,” which was named “Everest Mazdoor Mancha (EMM), was “to mobilize and encourage the general workers to seek and fight for their rights.” Pursuant to these goals, EMM glued several posters and statements in front of the main factory gate, demanding the immediate re-instatement of the suspended workers.

²² Tewary, K. *Everest Industries Ltd, Kolkata India: Victimizing the workers*. May 15, 2018. <http://ibasecretariat.org/kt-everest-industries-kolkata-india-victimizing-the-workers.php>

- CHINA: September 20, delegates from Taiwan, Korea and Japan gathered in Hong Kong to take part in the East Asia Asbestos Meeting to discuss issues related to the continuing use of asbestos in the region.
- BRAZIL: September 25, a public hearing was held in the São Paulo city of Capivari to warn Brazilians about the human health risks posed by exposures to asbestos; September 27 asbestos seminar in Vitória da Conquista examined the public health problems and environmental repercussions caused by the commercial exploitation of asbestos in the Bahia mining town of Bom Jesus da Serra between 1939 and 1967.
- SOUTH AFRICA: September 26, the Asbestos Interest Group from Kuruman, convened community members to discuss the environmental legacy posed by asbestos mining waste throughout the area.
- INDONESIA: September 30, car-free day in Bandung City presented the opportunity for ban asbestos activists to distribute information to people in West Java about the danger posed by asbestos exposures.
- NEPAL: October 6, asbestos awareness training session in Janakpur, an area where asbestos use is high.
- INDONESIA: October 11, two-day asbestos awareness workshop and strategy meeting in Jakarta for trade unionists, members of labor federations and NGO personnel.
- VIETNAM: October 12 conference in Hanoi, progressed discussions amongst government officials and WHO personnel on the banning asbestos.
- FRANCE: October 12, thousands marched through the streets of Paris protesting asbestos contamination of schools.
- INDONESIA: October 13, asbestos medical seminar to spread awareness of diagnosis techniques and treatments for asbestos-related disease was held in Jakarta; October 16, a ban asbestos demonstration took place in Bandung City, West Java organized by the Indonesian Ban Asbestos Network.
- NEPAL: October 28, delegates at a conference in Burgunj examined ways to improve implementation of the country's asbestos prohibitions.

Concluding Thoughts

In the face of ruthless and powerful asbestos interests, the campaign to outlaw asbestos use is growing in strength and scope. The ingenuity, panache and enthusiasm of global ban asbestos campaigners more than make up for our lack of financial resources. Let the asbestos profiteers be warned. Ours is a legitimate, grassroots campaign supported by thousands of individuals around the world. Poisoning for profits is reprehensible, unethical and indefensible. Industry stakeholders can no longer hide behind their wealth or positions; you cannot silence those who have stared death in the face as they watched loved ones die excruciating deaths from asbestos cancer. Ban asbestos campaigners will not be bullied or deterred from their efforts to make the world a safer place. An asbestos-free future is possible!