

## **More Deaths from Mesotheliomas than from Falls in Construction**

**FRIDAY 28<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 2006 - INTERNATIONAL WORKERS MEMORIAL DAY**

**THE BUILDING AND WOODWORKERS INTERNATIONAL SAYS  
FIGHT FOR A GLOBAL BAN ON ASBESTOS IN 2006 !!!**

**At the shocking world wide figure of 100, 000 people each year, deaths from asbestos related diseases have now outstripped deaths from industrial accidents in some countries. Many of those affected today worked in the building trades. The BWI coordinates a Global Campaign to get asbestos banned and to prevent workers being exposed to it where it already exists in buildings all over the world.**

### **The BWI Campaign**

#### **Popularise the asbestos campaign - Use April 28<sup>th</sup>**

Each year on the 28<sup>th</sup> April trade unions around the world organise events to observe International Workers Memorial Day. The purpose is to highlight the preventable nature of workplace accidents and ill health, and to promote campaigns and union organisation to improve health and safety at work. It is also a day to remember all those who have died because of their job. Our slogan is "Remember the dead and fight for the living".

This is our annual opportunity to promote prevention and to highlight the positive contribution to be made by trade unions, particularly through joint Health and Safety Committees. It's also an appropriate date to insist that employers comply with Safety Health and Environment legislation and to create strong social rejection towards negligent behaviour by employers that leads to people being killed or hurt.

#### **Make asbestos hazards visible on the 28th.**

Fatal accidents are the very tip of the iceberg, the most visible and dramatic impact of poor working conditions. In fact many more workers die from work related ill health, However we know that in most countries this is socially invisible, and that the workplace origin of the disease is not recognised, recorded or compensated. Asbestos related illness is a clear example of this problem.

#### **The news on the 28th**

Organise a press conference, give victims and their families a platform. The news for the press would be that the union convening the press conference will have written to the authorities to demand a ban on all further use of asbestos and immediate implementation of measures to avoid exposure to deadly asbestos dust. Of course there may be many other activities on the 28<sup>th</sup> aside from press conferences and letter writing that could help to get the point across: for example, demonstrations and meetings as well as workplace based activities such as inspection days or training sessions.

#### **Public Opinion – People Power**

Consumer boycotts – schools, hospitals, housing all riddled with asbestos. Through our campaigns and media coverage we can create strong social pressure to ban further use and to control exposure to existing asbestos.

### **Institutional pressure**

Where national tripartite committees on health and safety are in place, trade unions can raise demands for national legislation and policy on asbestos and protecting workers and communities from exposure.

### **Collective Bargaining and worker representation**

Apart from pressure at institutional level, to improve legislation and policy on asbestos, we encourage negotiation of agreements with companies so they do not use asbestos containing products. Pressure can be applied to make such agreements for public works and contracts.

Above all, if the legislation is to have any practical application, there must be structures in the workplace to ensure that workers are protected from exposure to asbestos. This includes: a written company policy and allocation of resources to implement the policy; a Joint Safety Committee, Trade Union Safety Representatives; information and training for workers; the right to refuse dangerous work and the right to stop the job if there is good reason to believe that workers may be exposed to asbestos.

### **Strong unions mean safe jobs**

Asbestos is a killer, along with many other serious health and safety hazards on building sites all over the world. The biggest threat to building workers' health is the flexible, informal employment practices and the resulting low trade union density in the sector. Workers solidarity is the best guarantee of decent working conditions.

In the first century AD, Pliny the Elder noted that slaves working in the asbestos mines died young of lung disease. In 2006, and more than a century after the first legislation on its use at work, we are still using asbestos despite all the scientific evidence that demonstrates its cancer causing potential.

### **The Hazard – asbestos kills**

Breathing air containing asbestos dust causes fatal lung diseases. There is usually a long delay between exposure to asbestos dust and the onset of the disease, this can be between 10 and 50 years. The more you are exposed to asbestos, the more chance you will get sick later on. If you smoke, your chances of lung cancer from asbestos exposure are much higher compared with a worker who does not smoke.

Asbestos fibres are so small and fine that you cannot see them. They are 2,000 times thinner than a human hair and are needle like in shape. When inhaled, those fibres which cannot be coughed up or breathed out can become deeply lodged in the lungs where they can cause irreparable scarring which continues to grow, even though there is no further exposure to asbestos.

### **Asbestos diseases**

#### **Pleural Thickening**

In pleural thickening, the lung walls thicken because of the scarring produced by the asbestos fibres. This is seen on x ray examination, or CT scan of the thorax. Since the fibres are lodged in the lining of the lung, there is a slow, continual process of replacement of healthy tissue into fibrous or scar tissue. Extensive thickening causes

severe shortness of breath. It may be described as on one side of the lungs, on both sides (bilateral) or it can be described as widespread (diffuse). This fibrosis places people at higher risk of developing other more serious diseases.

#### Pleural Plaques

In the case of pleural plaques, these are dense bands of scar tissue, different from pleural thickening, and also visible on x-ray or CT scan. Plaques are usually seen on both sides of the lung. The cause of the scarring is the same as in the case of pleural thickening. People with pleural plaques may not have any disability, but the person may go on to develop other asbestos related diseases, particularly lung cancer.

#### Asbestosis,

Is a disabling and ultimately fatal scarring of the lungs causing severe breathlessness and chest pains and general weakness. This disease is most common among workers who have had regular and high exposure to fibres, for example ladders, or those working in the manufacture of asbestos products. However, asbestosis does affect people who have only been exposed for short periods, and relatives of asbestos workers have developed asbestosis from fibres brought home on work clothes.

#### Lung cancer

A painful and fatal disease. Evidence for asbestos related lung cancer has been clear since the 1930s and 1940s. Lung cancer can be caused by even low levels of exposure to asbestos.

#### Mesothelioma

A rapid and painful cancer of the lining around the lungs (the pleura) and the abdomen (peritoneum). This form of cancer is only caused by asbestos, and was only recognised in the 1960s. These cancers have no relation to smoking. People with mesothelioma rarely live longer than 12 to 18 months after diagnosis.

#### Other types of cancer

There is also evidence of cancer of the larynx, and of gastro intestinal cancers (stomach, bowel) caused by asbestos exposure.

### **Who is at risk?**

Many of today's asbestos victims worked in building trades. They were insulators, plumbers, carpenters, joiners, pipefitters, shopfitters, electricians, sheet metal workers and demolition workers.

However, asbestos is still widely used in new construction materials, mainly in asbestos cement roofing and pipes. The breaking, cutting, sawing, drilling and sanding of asbestos cement releases asbestos fibres, and presents a very serious health hazard. 90% of all chrysotile asbestos is used in asbestos cement products.

Construction workers are still exposed to asbestos in buildings during maintenance, renovation and demolition work. Millions of tonnes of asbestos were used in buildings in the past. Much of this asbestos is still there and you cannot easily identify it from its appearance. Workers are exposed to this asbestos and breathe it in without realising it. It

may be only small quantities, but there are no safe levels of exposure. Asbestos is found in factories and warehouses; public buildings such as hospitals, government buildings, schools and libraries; and it is found in homes all over the world.

- As a spray coating on steel work, concrete walls and ceilings, for fire protection and insulation
- As insulation lagging on pipe work, ducts and boilers.
- As asbestos insulating board in partition walls, fire doors, ceiling tiles
- As asbestos cement products such as roofs, walls, tiles, water tanks, gutters, pipes and in decorative plaster finishes.

### **Protection**

Any asbestos material in buildings should be identified before work begins, but often sites are not checked for asbestos. If a suspect material is found, then it should be checked. All suspect material should be treated as if it contained asbestos.

Precarious contractual conditions and flexible employment practices in the construction industry undermine prevention measures and safe systems of work that should be in place. Information, training and trade union organising on health and safety saves lives.

### **ILO Convention 162**

#### **This requires employers to**

- prevent or control the release of asbestos dust into the air, to ensure that the exposure limits or other exposure criteria are complied with and also to reduce exposure to as low a level as is reasonably practicable.
- provide, maintain and replace, as necessary, at no cost to the workers, adequate respiratory protective equipment and special protective clothing. Respiratory protective equipment shall be used only as a supplementary, temporary, emergency or exceptional measure and not as an alternative to technical control.
- be responsible for the establishment and implementation of practical measures for the prevention and control of the exposure of the workers he employs to asbestos and for their protection against the hazards due to asbestos.
- make a written work plan to provide all necessary protection to the workers and
- limit the release of asbestos dust into the air; The workers or their representatives shall be consulted on the work plan.
- **On protective clothing and facilities**
- Where workers' personal clothing may become contaminated with asbestos dust, the employer in consultation with the workers' representatives, shall provide appropriate work clothing, which shall not be worn outside the workplace. National laws or regulations shall prohibit the taking home of work clothing and special protective clothing and of personal protective equipment. The employer shall be responsible for the cleaning, maintenance and storage of work clothing, special protective clothing and personal protective equipment.
- The employer shall provide facilities for workers exposed to asbestos to wash, take a bath or shower at the workplace, as appropriate.

- **Health surveillance**
- It also imposes duties to carry out workplace monitoring and surveillance of workers' health, rights to information and access to medical records.
- **Information for workers, it requires employers to**
- Promote dissemination of information and the education of all concerned with regard to health hazards due to exposure to asbestos and to methods of prevention and control.
- Provide written policies and procedures on measures for the education and periodic training of workers on asbestos hazards and methods of prevention and control.
- The employer shall ensure that all workers exposed or likely to be exposed to asbestos are informed about the health hazards related to their work, instructed in preventive measures and correct work practices and receive continuing training in these fields.
- **Campaign demands from the Building and Woodworkers International**
- **Prohibition of the use of all asbestos containing materials.**
- Ratification and practical application of ILO Convention 162 and the accompanying Recommendation 172.
- That the ILO calls for a global ban of all use of asbestos.

**Legislation governing the handling of asbestos in the workplace in order to:**

- focus on the groups of workers now considered to be most at risk. That is, those workers involved in removal of asbestos, in demolition, or in renovation and maintenance work in asbestos-containing buildings, during which exposure to asbestos is likely to occur.
- ensure proper risk assessment;
- take into consideration different information and training needs of workers depending on the type of exposure involved;
- emphasise the prevention or minimisation of exposure.

**Safe systems of work to include the following:**

- identification of a material presumed to contain asbestos must be carried out prior to any demolition, reconstruction or maintenance work;
- assess the likely exposure and set out steps to prevent or reduce this to the lowest level practicable;
- firms must provide evidence of their competence in the field of demolition and/or the removal of material containing asbestos;
- the employer is required to provide an adequate training programme for all workers who handle, or are liable to handle, products or materials containing asbestos.
- demarcation of work posts
- prohibited access for workers who are not involved,
- the need for separate storage places,
- specific hygiene measures, the wearing of appropriate working and protective clothing

### **Monitoring and health surveillance**

- continuous review of the risks associated with commonly used substitutes
- the obligation for the employer to notify the competent authority of the types and quantities of asbestos used and the activities and processes involved in activities in which workers are or may be exposed to dust arising from asbestos or materials containing asbestos
- the right for workers and/or their representatives to have access to the documents which are the subject of the notification
- access for workers and their representatives to the results of measurements and the obligation for the employer to inform the workers concerned and their representatives if limit values are exceeded
- regular monitoring of the health of the workers exposed and the obligation to keep an exposure register to which the doctors/authorities responsible for medical surveillance and the workers concerned have access to their own files.

### **International Trade Union Campaign on Asbestos**

We encourage the following measures be undertaken by trade unions:

- **Asbestos ban:** Trade unions should lobby their national governments to introduce a ban on asbestos, as part of an international initiative to ban asbestos throughout the world.
- **Protection of workers:** Trade unions should lobby their governments to ratify, effectively apply and enforce ILO Convention 162 as a minimum standard to protect workers who may be exposed to asbestos through their work. Trade unions should ensure that the best protection methods to prevent exposure to asbestos fibres is available to workers who have to remove asbestos.
- **Awareness raising:** Trade unions should develop and maintain a broad-based international campaign to educate workers, the union movement and the public about the risks of exposure to asbestos fibres and the measures to be taken to prevent ill-health and to secure a global ban on asbestos;
- **Alternatives:** Trade unions should seek the replacement of asbestos with alternative substances that are less harmful to human health and the environment. Research should be promoted into technology to develop alternative substances to asbestos where that technology does not currently exist.
- **Information exchange:** Trade unions in countries that manufacture and use asbestos substitutes should distribute technical information on the substitutes to sister unions in countries where those substitutes are not currently manufactured and used.
- **Just Transition:** Where workers may be displaced because of the introduction of an asbestos ban, trade unions should lobby for a Just Transition to protect the income, employment and welfare of those affected and their communities.
- **Legal action:** Trade unions should seek through their legal systems to bring to justice those employers whose negligence has caused asbestos diseases and environmental damage to the community. The polluter must pay the remediation costs of any environmental damage done by their operations.
- **Compensation:** Trade unions should seek appropriate and prompt compensation for workers who suffer from asbestos related diseases.

- **Treatment:** Trade unions should campaign to ensure that the victims of asbestos related disease will have access to appropriate medical treatment, support services and information.

**The BWI calls for action from national governments and from the International Labour Organisation.**

In November 2004, the second Global Asbestos Conference was held in Tokyo, Japan. The IFBWW was present with a delegation from Japan, India, Malaysia, Philippines, South Korea and Singapore. The following statement was made jointly from the IFBWW the UITBB and the Christian Federation of Building and Wood Workers.

The intention of this statement is to put pressure on the International Labour Organisation to call for a global ban on all use of asbestos.

Since ILO Convention No. 162, concerning safety in the use of asbestos, and its accompanying Recommendation 172 were drafted twenty years ago, epidemiological research in developed countries such as Finland, Italy, France, Germany, Japan, the Netherlands, Australia, the UK, the U.S., has discovered national asbestos disease epidemics. Although statistical data from developing economies is rare, an estimation of the incidence of occupational asbestos-related illness can be made based on the scale of national asbestos consumption. Taking into account the increase of asbestos use in developing countries, we believe it is essential that the ILO clarifies its position on asbestos by calling for a global ban on its use.

Much has changed in the twenty years since the ILO's asbestos guidelines were introduced. By the mid-1980s when Convention 162 was drafted, only the Scandinavian countries had banned asbestos; by the beginning of 2006, 40 countries in Europe, the Americas, the Middle East, the Antipodes and Asia have imposed national asbestos bans. Major international bodies including the International Programme on Chemical Safety, the European Union, the Collegium Ramazzini, the Senior Labour Inspectors Committee, the International Social Security Association, the World Trade Organization, the Building and Woodworkers International, the International Metalworkers' Federation and the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions support the pro-ban position. So do the Governments of: Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Chile, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Egypt, Estonia, Finland, France, Gabon, Germany, Greece, Honduras, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Kuwait, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Saudi Arabia, Seychelles, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom and Uruguay and scores of independent scientists.

At the moment the asbestos industry uses the ILO position on "controlled use" of asbestos as an alibi to continue putting asbestos cement products into the built environment. Asbestos stakeholders aggressively lobby international bodies, such as the ILO and the International Organisation of Employers, national governments, consumers and the media; their efforts are motivated primarily by a desire to preserve asbestos sales. As asbestos bans and restrictions have negatively impacted on exports to industrialized countries, asbestos salesmen have turned their attention to countries with few, if any, health and safety restrictions.

**Joint Declaration from the International Building Trade Union Federations, made at the Global Asbestos Congress, Tokyo, 19-21 November 2004.**

The International Federation of Building and Wood Workers (IFBWW), the World Federation of Building Workers (WFBW) and the Trades Union International of Workers in the Building, Wood and Building Materials Industries (UITBB) are committed to actively promote the global ban of all forms of asbestos from the construction industry and from all other industrial sectors, and to promote the effective regulation of work with in-situ asbestos in demolition, conversion, renovation and maintenance works by law.

Considering that:

- \* All forms of asbestos, including chrysotile, are classified as known human carcinogens by the International Agency for Research on Cancer and by the International Programme for Chemical Safety
- \* 90% of chrysotile asbestos is used in asbestos cement materials
- \* 100, 000 workers die every year from diseases caused by exposure to asbestos
- \* It has taken three decades of protracted efforts and the emergence of suitable alternatives for a comprehensive ban on the manufacture and use of asbestos and asbestos-containing products to be adopted in a number of countries. Furthermore that these countries now permit the handling of in situ asbestos only during asbestos removal, demolition, renovation and maintenance work carried out under strictly controlled working conditions.

The IFBWW, the UITBB and the WFBW call upon the governments and social partners of all countries to:

- \* Take immediate steps to ban all mining, manufacture, recycling and use of all forms of asbestos and asbestos-containing materials as soon as possible.
- \* Undertake and support all measures intended to eliminate asbestos and asbestos-containing products from the economic cycle and to replace asbestos with less harmful products.
- \* Make the protection of workers against asbestos exposure a priority
- \* Ratify and implement the provisions of ILO Convention 162 (1986), Safety in the Use of Asbestos, and to implement the provisions of its accompanying Recommendation 172 as a minimum standard not to be fallen below.
- \* Ensure proper compensation to the victims of asbestos related diseases

The IFBWW, the UITBB and the WFBW further call upon the International Labour Organisation to:

- \* Adopt a clear health-based position in favour of the elimination of the use of all forms of asbestos and asbestos containing materials.
- \* Continue to encourage Member States to ratify and implement the provisions of Convention 162 (1986), Safety in the Use of Asbestos, and to implement the provisions of its accompanying Recommendation 172, as a minimum standard not to be fallen below.
- \* Make an explicit statement clarifying to all member States that Convention 162 does not provide a justification for, or endorsement of, the continued use of asbestos.
- \* Resolve to promote the elimination of the use of all forms of asbestos and asbestos-containing materials in all Member States

\* Assist Member States by drawing up national action programmes for the management, control and elimination of asbestos from the working and social environment.

**The BWI organizes 350 trade unions representing over 12 million  
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