

Press Release

Asbestos Causes 30 Deaths Every Day

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BANI Appreciates “National Asbestos Awareness Week” Resolution in US Senate

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BANI Condemns Promotion of Asbestos Trade by Quebec, Canada

New Delhi 19/2/2011: Ban Asbestos Network of India (BANI) appreciates the introduction of resolution for National Asbestos Awareness Week. BANI hopes that this initiative of the US Senators will pave the way for the implementation of Ban Asbestos America Act 2007 and inspire India Parliament to pass the pending White Asbestos (Ban on Use and Import) Bill, 2009 which was mentioned by Supreme Court of India in para 15 of its 21st January, 2011 order.

In the US, Senator Max Baucus (D-MT) has introduced a resolution that declares the first week of April as “National Asbestos Awareness Week” and seeks to “raise public awareness about the prevalence of asbestos-related diseases and the dangers of asbestos exposure.”

Asbestos is a known human carcinogen and exposure can cause asbestos-related diseases, including mesothelioma, lung cancer and asbestosis. Studies estimate that during the next decade, 107,000 workers around the world will die of an asbestos related disease - equaling 300 deaths per day.

Meanwhile, Clement Gignac, Quebec Minister of Economic Development, Innovation and Export is promoting controversial Chrysotile asbestos in India. This killer fiber is mined in Quebec, Canada but its mining is banned in India. BANI condemns such double standards given the fact that Canada is busy decontaminating its asbestos laden buildings and has adopted a no home use policy.

Bihar has emerged a destination of such hazardous minerals which is banned in almost entire industrialized world. The proponents of some 12 asbestos plants in Bihar say they will get their supplies of asbestos minerals from Canada and other asbestos producing countries.

About 75 miles north of the U.S.- Canadian border, politicians and in Quebec claim that chrysotile asbestos (white asbestos) being mined from Canada’s last asbestos mine is perfectly safe, harmless to the miners and the workers and consumers who will handle it. This has outraged physicians, public health workers and toxicologists throughout the world who violently disagree because asbestos fibers have caused the deaths of millions. Hundred of thousands of people have died from mesothelioma, other forms of lung cancer and asbestosis due breathing chrysotile fibers.

Baljit Chadha, a Montreal-based entrepreneur who is leading a consortium, Balcorp Ltd., of foreign investors that wants to purchase the mine wants to buy Jeffrey Mine, one of world’s largest asbestos mines to supply much of the world’s asbestos market for at least 25 years. BANI feels that such blind lust for profit can only be deemed barbaric and inhuman. Government of Canada and India which are supporting it are guilty of crime against humanity. It’s a classic case of profit-over-public health and safety attitude.

It has been noted that Chadha's would-be investors — from Canada, Europe, Brazil and India — have asked the Quebec government for a \$57 million loan guarantee (US dollars) to complete construction of the underground mine here, which they say will bring new life to this moribund asbestos-producing region, 95 miles east of Montreal.

Chadha has been selling Canadian asbestos to India and other countries for the past 15 years. Balcop says all of the asbestos produced from Mine Jeffrey about half will be going to India. "It is almost beyond belief that a free and democratic nation like Canada is willing to sacrifice human lives in poor and developing nations on the altar of avarice and greed," says Dr. Michael Harbut, a cancer specialist who is the chief of the Center for Occupational and Environmental Medicine at Michigan's Karmanos Cancer Institute in an interview to Cold Truth, a journal of investigative journalism.

If this is commonplace in developed countries, experts worry what's going to happen to safety restrictions in countries where bribes and baksheesh are the norm.

"Canada seems to care more for its own economic well-being and not weigh the horrible effects their greed will have on the lives of countless others throughout the world will suffer and die from continued exposure to asbestos," Dr. Richard Lemen, former U.S. assistant surgeon general told the journal.

"The notion that their asbestos is 'safe' or that 'controlled usage' will result in no disease is a myth."

"It is ludicrous, completely absurd, to believe that some countries in ... southern and Southeast Asia can implement safe work policies that have been impossible to implement in Western countries," said Egilman, who is also an associate professor of family medicine at Brown University.

Barry Castleman, a noted international asbestos researcher who has long fought for a worldwide ban on the deadly mineral as a representative to the World Trade Organization, says, "If this loan deal goes through, it will revive Canada's asbestos industry and cost untold thousands to die, from Canada continuing to lead the propaganda efforts pushing global asbestos use."

"Asbestos Awareness Week is a rallying cry to keep the tragedy of Libby from happening again. It's also an opportunity to remind people that much more work lies ahead to help victims of asbestos-related diseases," said Baucus, who was instrumental in urging the EPA to declare its first ever public health emergency in Libby. "Although we can never fully right the outrageous wrong that took place in Libby, we can fight to make sure the community has the tools it needs to heal. And, we can keep working hard to make sure the public is aware of the tragic impact of asbestos exposure."

"Asbestos Disease Awareness Organization (ADAO) applauds the U.S. Senate for its introduction of the Seventh Annual Resolution recognizing National Asbestos Awareness Week," said Linda Reinstein, President and Co-Founder of the ADAO. "It is only through continued awareness that we can succeed in our efforts to ban asbestos both in the US and globally. Our leadership continues to set an important example through this yearly initiative. We have witnessed pivotal change as doctors, scientists, governmental bodies, educators and asbestos victims come together to share information that has the power to save lives. We look forward to continued progress and each year we get closer to a future without asbestos."

* *For Details: Gopal Krishna, Ban Asbestos Network of India (BANI).*

* *Web: banasbestosindia.blogspot.com*

Doug Larkin, Director of Communications, Asbestos Disease Awareness Organization (ADAO)

