

MEDIA RELEASE

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Immediate release

Canada's proposed asbestos ban – an important momentum builder for public health protection

Advocates claim continued federal leadership necessary to move towards eliminating legacy asbestos

Toronto, ON – Collective relief expressed by activists and public health advocates across Canada, as federal government released its long-awaited regulations banning the use, import and sale of asbestos, and manufacture and import of products containing asbestos, over the weekend. Canada now joins over 50 countries that have banned asbestos but advocates seek continued government leadership to build its strategy to eliminate legacy asbestos issues to protect public health from ongoing exposure to asbestos, known to cause mesothelioma, asbestosis and a range of cancers, mostly resulting from workplace exposure.

“The proposed regulation has been a long time coming. It is an essential piece of the federal strategy announced last year.” states Fe de Leon, Researcher and Paralegal at the Canadian Environmental Law Association. “This regulation provides some certainty that asbestos exposure to Canadians and workers will reduce over time starting in 2019. However, the government should take this opportunity to build on its strategy to address potential exposure from legacy asbestos.”

In the coming weeks, NGOs will review the government’s proposed regulations to ensure that the ultimate goal to ban asbestos is achieved. The elements of the proposed regulations that require further reconsideration include:

- Shorten exclusions permitted under the regulations through adoption of safe alternatives, particularly the chlor-alkali industry;
- Require alternative assessment for affected industry to ensure transition to safe alternatives;
- Establish acceptable limits of asbestos residue; and
- Ensure annual reporting and permitting requirements for asbestos use are publicly released and accessible.

Data shows that asbestos exposure in 2011 resulted in 427 cases of mesothelioma and another 1904 lung cancer cases in Canada.¹ In Ontario, 750 cases of asbestos related diseases annually resulted in 630 lung cancers and 140 mesothelioma cases.²

¹Tompa E, Kalcevich C, McLeod C, et al. The economic burden of lung cancer and mesothelioma due to occupational and para-occupational asbestos exposure. *Occup Environ Med* Published Online First: 29 July 2017. doi: 10.1136/oemed-2016-104173. Also see: <http://oem.bmj.com/content/early/2017/07/28/oemed-2016-104173>

Canada's analysis noted that the proposed regulations would reduce asbestos exposure over time, but estimates that asbestos would be reduced by approximately 4700 tonnes, reduced between 2019-2035, from three industry sectors: chlor-alkali, automotive and construction. Exclusions are proposed for the chlor-alkali industry until 2025. Decline in asbestos exposure over time would also be attributable to reductions in exposure limits in federal workplaces established in 2017.

"The asbestos legacy will continue to contribute to the unacceptable numbers of cases of asbestos related diseases we see in Canada. Canada has the momentum to be amongst the global leaders to address exposure from legacy asbestos." states Laura Lozanski, Occupational Health & Safety Officer at the Canadian Association of University Teachers. "It would require the collective efforts by key government departments to address very difficult issues including tracking and recording non-federal buildings containing asbestos and those people who have been exposed to asbestos."

The proposed exclusions for asbestos use remain a significant concern. "The proposed regulation should require industry to find safe alternatives to asbestos now," noted Joseph Castrilli, Counsel at the Canadian Environmental Law Association, "The focus on alternatives will facilitate reduced asbestos exposure over time."

In December 2016, advocates and civil society organizations urged Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to establish an expert review panel on asbestos to investigate and find solutions for sources of on-going asbestos exposure and establish transition plans for communities affected by asbestos.

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² Ontario Cancer Research Centre and Cancer Care Ontario. 2017. Burden of Occupational Disease in Ontario: Major Workplace Carcinogens and Prevention Exposure. See: <https://www.cancercareontario.ca/sites/ccocancercare/files/assets/OCRCBurdenofOccupationalCancerReport.pdf>