

Extra-Congress Submission

15.3 EFFECTS OF THE INHALATION OF ASBESTOS FIBRES ON HUMAN HEALTH: THE CURRENT STATE OF KNOWLEDGE AND THE SCIENTIFIC GROUNDS FOR A POLICY THAT PRIORITISES LIFE, HEALTH AND THE ENVIRONMENT

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Full Portuguese text

Abstract

This paper describes the various types of asbestos and the location of the main commercially exploited deposits in the world. Statistics on world production by country in the period 1988-1994 are provided. More detailed figures on Brazilian mining and manufacture of asbestos products and Brazilian exports are given. The main uses of asbestos are listed.

The author goes on to look at the health effects of asbestos exposure, noting the major international advances in medical knowledge and understanding of asbestos related diseases during the course of the 20th century. The diseases themselves are described, along with their symptoms and procedures for diagnosis. An informative and detailed look at the history of Brazilian medical research into the incidence of asbestos related disease follows. The author notes that the incidence of asbestosis has been well documented for 45 years but it is only recently that a significant number of mesotheliomas has been detected. The author then provides carefully documented evidence to show that chrysotile is a carcinogenic substance; that it causes asbestosis, lung cancer, mesothelioma of the pleura and peritoneum; and that there are no safe levels of exposure.

After an examination of the way the international community has responded to the dangers of asbestos, including the European Union decision in July 1999 to ban asbestos, the author analyses the myths propagated by the industry and the official position of the Brazilian government. The author notes that there is wide acceptance of the “controlled use” position, a stance given some credence by ILO Convention 162’s use of the term “safe use of asbestos”. The Brazilian Government and public underestimate the gravity of the situation and the widespread nature of environmental as well as occupational exposure. The author claims that the government is, in effect, defending chrysotile against the tide of history and calls on it to immediately reverse this position.

Abstract compiled by Chris Whitehouse.