

November 19, 2012

Margaret Chan  
Director General, World Health Organization

Dear Margaret Chan:

We are appalled to learn that a representative of the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) is apparently scheduled to participate in a conference, Chrysotile Asbestos: Risk Assessment and Management, to be held in Kiev, Ukraine November 21 and 22. We are addressing this urgent matter to you as the international Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) is part of the World Health Organisation (WHO).

The conference has been organised by institutes of the Ukraine and Russia. As you know, these institutes were discontinued from the redesignation as WHO collaborating centres by your decision a few years ago, because of their promotion of continued use of chrysotile asbestos and conflicts of interest endangering WHO's credibility. These institutes criticize WHO and IARC positions and deny the clear, independent, reputable science regarding harm caused by chrysotile asbestos. We have concerns that these institutes, especially the Russian institute, are trying to use IARC's reputation to distort scientific evidence already established among the world public health community (<http://ibasecretariat.org/lka-whats-going-on-at-iarc.php>).

We believe that the purpose of this conference is to promote the continued use of chrysotile asbestos. Scientists who have been financed by and linked to the asbestos industry for many years and who promote continued use of chrysotile asbestos will be making presentations at the conference. The aim of this conference is to sabotage the efforts of the World Health Organization to end use of chrysotile asbestos and to sabotage the recommendation of the Rotterdam Convention's expert scientific committee to list chrysotile asbestos as a hazardous substance, which will be put forward at the upcoming 2013 Conference of the Parties to the Rotterdam Convention.

Recognizing the destructive impact of the global tobacco lobby in subverting the work of the WHO and public health agencies to protect people from being harmed by tobacco products, the WHO and the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control forbid the participation of the tobacco industry, participation of government agencies working in conjunction with the tobacco industry, and participation of scientists working with and for the tobacco industry, in meetings concerning health protection against tobacco harm.

The WHO rightfully decided it was obliged to adopt this policy forbidding collaboration with the tobacco industry because of the conflict of interest of the tobacco industry and because of the long, sordid history of subversion of public health policy by the tobacco industry and its governmental and scientific allies.

The same long, sordid history of subversion of public health policy and the same problem of conflict of interest applies to the asbestos lobby.

We call on you to immediately cancel the participation of IARC in this sham scientific conference, which brings together governmental agencies and scientists that collaborate with the asbestos industry and which aims to promote the interests of the asbestos industry and defeat public health efforts around the world to prevent further deaths from asbestos-related diseases.

We are also disturbed by the fact that IARC is collaborating with scientists who are the Russian asbestos industry's strongest defenders and who deny the independent, reputable science on harm caused by chrysotile asbestos in a study, *Historical cohort study of cancer mortality following exposure to chrysotile asbestos at the Uralasbest plant in Asbest, Russian Federation*.

We would like to know how this study is being funded and whether the IARC Ethics Committee has approved this involvement of IARC. Given the indistinguishability between the government and the asbestos industry in Russia, we believe there is cause for serious concern about associating IARC's name with studies that appear to us to be influenced and controlled by the asbestos industry.

We request your immediate reply on these urgent concerns, which, in our view, put the reputation, integrity and credibility of IARC at risk.

Sincerely,

FROM:

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- Dr Richard Lemen, Assistant Surgeon General (Retired), USA

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