

THE LANCET

THE LANCET: Press Release

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LANCET CONDEMNS HYPOCRITICAL CANADA AND QUÉBEC GOVERNMENTS FOR EXPORTING DEADLY ASBESTOS TO VULNERABLE DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

In a [World Report](#) published [Online First](#) and in this week's *Lancet*, the governments of both Canada and Québec are condemned by a number of anti-asbestos campaigners and the Canadian Medical Association for exporting asbestos to vulnerable developing countries. *Lancet* Editor Dr Richard Horton adds *The Lancet's* voice to those calling on the Québec Government not to provide a loan guarantee to a consortium that will revive Canada's currently dying asbestos exports for another 25 years. The [World Report](#) is written by Tony Kirby, Media Relations Manager at *The Lancet*.

For many years, Canada has been a major exporter of white asbestos or 'chrysotile', with other major exporters being Russia, Kazakhstan, and Brazil. But in the past two decades, bans on chrysotile (in addition to those long in force for blue and brown asbestos) have existed, either in law or de facto, in many high-income countries, including the United Kingdom, which banned chrysotile in 1999, and Canada itself, which has not legally banned chrysotile but has a de facto ban. As such, more and more of Canada's asbestos has been going to developing countries, where few or no protections exist and as such a time-bomb of deadly asbestos-related death and disease will continue to grow. Mesothelioma is a specific lung cancer caused by exposure to asbestos, and diagnosis is almost always a death sentence. In the UK, deaths from mesothelioma have climbed from 895 in 1990 to 2,249 in 2008, with no sign of declining, as the effects of workers' exposure in the 1960s and 70s continue to manifest. Similar trends are occurring in other high-income nations.

Canada's chrysotile resources have been dwindling. However, an Indian-led consortium (led by Montreal-based financier Baljit Chadha) is now planning to convert the recently closed Jeffrey Mine in Québec from open pit to underground, which would see Canada produce and export some 10% of the world's asbestos again. Protests are going on in London (9 Dec), Québec, and Asian cities against the Québec and Canada governments to stop the loan guarantee being given. In London, a coalition of UK anti-asbestos groups are protesting against the reopening of the Jeffrey Mine outside Canada House, London, before handing in a petition to 10 Downing Street. In Québec, an Asian Delegation from affected importing countries (including Indonesia, India, Korea and Japan) is holding a number of public events and press conferences across the province.

Laurie Kazan-Allen, coordinator of the International Ban Asbestos Secretariat (IBAS) and producer of the British Asbestos Newsletter says: "For over a decade, we have been engaged in a David and Goliath battle with asbestos lobbyists, stakeholder governments and commercial interests. They maintain that asbestos can be used safely under controlled conditions, but we know this is wrong. A new asbestos mine in Québec would be an abomination."

Kathleen Ruff, Canadian anti-asbestos campaigner, author of *Exporting Harm: How Canada Exports Asbestos to the Developing World*, and senior human rights adviser to the Rideau

Institute, an independent research and advocacy organisation in Ottawa, says: "It's not too late for the Québec Government to change its mind and deny the loan guarantee. They must set an example to the other asbestos exporters worldwide. If this mine re-opens, the Canadian and Québec Governments will have blood on their hands for generations to come."

If governments in Canada recognise that restrictions and regulations are essential to protect our citizens from the devastating effects of this hazardous product, why do they allow asbestos to be exported to other countries that may lack the resources to protect their own citizens?" asks CMA president Jeff Turnbull. "We have a social responsibility to protect not only the health of Canadians but that of citizens elsewhere who are being harmed by a Canadian export. Canada should not be abdicating this responsibility," he adds. Dr Richard Horton, Editor of *The Lancet*, said: "The links between asbestos and lung cancer, including mesothelioma, have long been established. The governments of Québec and Canada should not be exporting asbestos to developing nations where there are few or no workplace regulations to protect workers or the general population from its lethal effects. They should, as governments of a high-income nation, be setting an example to other asbestos-exporting nations – such as Russia and Kazakhstan – by declaring this practice is no longer acceptable.

"*The Lancet* adds its voice to those of the many anti-asbestos campaigners worldwide, the Canadian Medical Association, and others, who are calling for an end to this immoral export of asbestos-related death and disease to some of the most vulnerable people in the world. We call on the Government of Québec not to back re-development of the Jeffrey Mine which would continue asbestos exports for another 25 years. Like WHO, *The Lancet* will be happy to see asbestos phased out of use of in all parts of the world."

Laurie Kazan-Allen, coordinator of the International Ban Asbestos Secretariat (IBAS) and producer of the British Asbestos Newsletter T) +44 (0) 208 958 3887 / +44 (0) 7766 645880 E) lka@btinternet.com

Kathleen Ruff, Canadian anti-asbestos campaigner, author of *Exporting Harm: How Canada Exports Asbestos to the Developing World*, and senior human rights adviser to the Rideau Institute. T) +1 514 571-2696 E) kruff@bulkley.net

For Dr Jeff Turnbull, President, Canadian Medical Association, please contact Lucie Boileau Manager, Media Relations +1 613 731-8610 ext 1266 / + 1 613 447-0866 E) Lucie.Boileau@cma.ca

For Dr Richard Horton, Editor, *The Lancet*, please contact Tony Kirby T) +44 (0) 20 7424 4949 / +44 (0) 7920 592635 E) tony.kirby@lancet.com

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