



MALAYSIA’S PUBLIC HEALTH UNDER THREAT: GROUPS WARN VS. FOREIGN ASBESTOS INDUSTRY HIJACKING NATIONAL PHASE-OUT

In conjunction with Global Asbestos Awareness Week 2026, we, the undersigned organisations, issue an urgent warning to all Malaysians: **our national public health is once again in the crosshairs of the foreign asbestos industry lobby.**

In 2014, Malaysia was on the brink of enacting a lifesaving ban on asbestos, only for the initiative to be indefinitely derailed by intense corporate pushback. Today, as the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Sustainability (NRES) rightly moves to review and phase out this toxic mineral, the International Chrysotile Association (ICA) is once again attempting to hijack our national policy. We cannot allow history to repeat itself.

The ICA recently issued a statement claiming there is “no scientific evidence” of negative health impacts from chrysotile asbestos in Malaysia, while championing the deadly myth of “controlled use”. This is a dangerous, profit-driven falsehood. We stand resolutely with the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the International Labour Organisation (ILO), who have unequivocally declared that all forms of asbestos, including chrysotile, are highly carcinogenic. There is **absolutely no safe level of asbestos exposure.**

Furthermore, the ICA’s attempts to weaponise the October 2025 judgment by India’s National Green Tribunal (NGT) are deliberately misleading. The ICA falsely frames this ruling as a rejection of a ban and an endorsement of the industry.

In reality, the NGT struck a devastating blow to the asbestos lobby's core defence. The Tribunal explicitly rejected the long-standing industry myth that chrysotile fibres are safely “locked” within asbestos-cement products, ruling that they do indeed release lethal fibres during weathering and breakage. The NGT formally legally classified asbestos fibres as air, water, and environmental pollutants, recognised the severe dangers of non-occupational exposure, and mandated the Indian government to formulate an urgent action plan regarding the use of asbestos materials. The NGT did not endorse the use of asbestos cement roofing in schools, but in reality, it has outsourced the work to the Indian government to frame policy around this issue. Twisting a legal mandate that exposes the dangers of their product into a supposed “victory” is a desperate deception by an industry running out of time.

As mentioned, the global asbestos industry is in terminal decline. For the first time since 1950, global production has fallen below one million tonnes. The world is moving on. Even the Asian Development Bank (ADB) instituted a strict ban on all asbestos-containing materials in its projects starting in January 2026. Malaysia must align with these global standards rather than allowing itself to remain a dumping ground for a dying, toxic industry.

That said, the inconsistency in our current domestic policy is hard to ignore. The Malaysian government banned the use of asbestos in all government buildings, including offices, schools, hospitals, and clinics as far back as 2005. Why, then, is this known Group 1 carcinogen still permitted in private industries and residential homes? A two-tiered system that protects only certain segments of the population, namely government officials’ health, while exposing ordinary workers, consumers, and families to deadly asbestos, is discriminatory and unacceptable.

Delaying this ban is a ticking time bomb for our public healthcare system. Asbestos-related diseases (ARDs), such as mesothelioma and asbestosis, carry a latency period of 20 to 40 years. We only need to look to Australia, where, despite banning asbestos decades ago, the nation still grapples with a tragic rise in asbestos-related mortality, with approximately 4,000 Australians dying from ARDs per year due to legacy exposures. Every day we delay the phase-out and impose a comprehensive ban on asbestos in Malaysia, we condemn a future generation to preventable suffering and saddle our economy with massive, avoidable healthcare burdens.

We call upon the Malaysian government to stand firm against any influence or lobbying from the industry. We urge the administration to restore public confidence by demonstrating that the health of its people is paramount. We demand immediate stakeholder engagement, the publication of the government's working paper on the asbestos ban, and the announcement of a clear, uncompromising timeline for a total phase-out. A long-overdue comprehensive national ban on asbestos must be implemented before the next General Election.

Finally, we urge all Malaysians to unite and fight against any foreign industry influence. Banning asbestos is fundamentally a matter of national interest. Delaying the ban serves only to profit foreign asbestos conglomerates at the direct expense of Malaysian lives. Our fate and our health must be decided by Malaysians, for Malaysians. Leave no room for the asbestos industry to dictate our future.

Issued by:

1. Building and Woodworkers' International (BWI)
2. Consumers' Association Penang (CAP)
3. Health and Safety Advisory Center (HASAC)
4. Sahabat Alam Malaysia (SAM)
5. Malaysian Medical Association (MMA)
6. National Cancer Society Malaysia (NCSM)
7. Malaysian Trade Union Congress (MTUC)
8. UNI Malaysia Labour Centre (UNI-MLC)
9. Labour Law Reform Coalition (LLRC)
10. Galen Centre for Health and Social Policy
11. ASEAN Services Employees Trade Union Council (ASETUC)
12. Malayan Nurses Union (MNU)
13. Sabah Medical Services Union (SMSU)
14. Sarawak Medical Services Union (SMSU)
15. Monitoring Sustainability of Globalisation (MSN)
16. Greenpeace Malaysia
17. Third World Network (TWN)
18. Malaysian Nature Society

19. Federation of Malaysian Consumers Associations (FOMCA)
20. Sabah Timber Industry Employees Union (STIEU)
21. Kesatuan Pekerja-pekerja Perbadanan Kemajuan Negeri Selangor (KPPPKNS)
22. Malay Forestry Officers Union (MFOU)
23. Union of Forestry Employees Sarawak (UFES)
24. National Union of Transport Equipment and Allied Industries Workers (NUTEAIW)
25. National Union of Employees in Companies Manufacturing Rubber Product (NUECMRP)
26. Paper and Paper Products Manufacturing Employees Union (PPPMEU)
27. Electronics Industry Employees Union Coalition (EIEUC)
28. National Union Of Textile, Garment, Leather, Fibre, Plastic of Peninsular Malaysia (NUTGLFP)
29. Sarawak Bank Employees' Union (SBEU)
30. North South Initiative (NSI)
31. Kuala Lumpur and Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall Youth Section (KLSCAH Youth)
32. Kuala Lumpur and Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall Civil Rights Committee (KLSCAH-CRC)
33. Mandiri
34. Treat Every Environment Special (TrEES)
35. RimbaWatch Malaysia
36. Suara Rakyat Malaysia (SUARAM)
37. SIUMAN Collective
38. Gabungan Darurat Iklim Malaysia (GDIMY)
39. Saya Anak Bangsa Malaysia (SABM)
40. Environmental Protection Society Malaysia (EPSM)
41. Agora Society Malaysia
42. Pertubuhan Pelindung Khazanah Alam
43. Persatuan Penduduk Bukit Manda'rina Fasa 2, Kuala Lumpur
44. Klima Action Malaysia (KAMY)