



MEDIA RELEASE

September 29, 2015

Asbestos: Killer Fibre!

Paris, France: An explosive report released today at the 13th Congress of the European Trade Union Confederation documents a shocking loss of life caused by asbestos exposures throughout the European Union (EU), with the number of deaths per year estimated to be in excess of 47,000.¹

The figures cited by Dr. Jukka Takala and the co-authors of this report are more than treble previous estimates but, as bad as they are, they do not tell the whole story about Europe's asbestos pandemic.² There are multiple reasons for this. The deaths counted exclude:

- those from environmental or domestic asbestos exposures – which are killing even more people in asbestos hotspots than workplace exposures;
- fatalities from other asbestos-related diseases such as cancers of the larynx and ovary, and possibly stomach, colorectal and pharynx cancers;
- asbestos-related mortality from European countries not in the EU, many of which continue to consume large amounts of asbestos and asbestos-containing products.

Commenting on the contents of this report, Laurie Kazan-Allen, Coordinator of the International Ban Asbestos Secretariat said:

“Time and time again, civil society groups have pressed the European Commission and European Union to take coordinated and decisive action on the asbestos hazard. The political will to engage with this crisis has been sorely lacking. In light of the new data, the authorities should make good on their promise to constitute a European Asbestos Taskforce as a matter of utmost urgency.”³

Reacting to the new report, Dr. Evelyn Glensk from the German Federal Association of Asbestos Victims Groups highlighted the marginalization of the injured:

“The results presented by Jukka Takala et al are really important evidence for our members. For every case of mesothelioma compensated by the statutory insurance authorities in Germany, there are 0.8 cases of asbestos-related lung cancer compensated. Thousands of Germans suffering from asbestos-related lung cancer receive no recognition, compensation or benefits. This report substantiates our criticism against arbitrary medical

¹ Takala J. *Eliminating occupational cancer in Europe*. September 29, 2015. Published by the European Trade Union Institute.

http://ibasecretariat.org/takala_wp_2015_elim_occ_cancer_europe.pdf

² In April 2015, the WHO Regional Director for Europe Dr Zsuzsanna Jakab told delegates to a WHO conference in Israel that asbestos-related diseases were killing 15,000 Europeans every year.

http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=50739#.VgaLT_2FNMs

³ Kazan-Allen L. *Freeing Europe Safely from Asbestos*. September 1, 2015
<http://ibasecretariat.org/lka-report-brussels-conf-june-24-2015.php>

diagnostic assessment standards, the primary purpose of which is to prevent legitimate claims from succeeding.”

Graham Dring, Chair of the Asbestos Victims Support Groups Forum UK, was categorical about the deadly hazard posed by asbestos in the UK:

“Despite regulations and guidelines on minimizing asbestos exposures in the UK, hazardous exposures at work, school and home remain a fact of life. Unless the government agrees to implement a national policy of asbestos eradication, the UK will continue to see an increase in avoidable asbestos-related deaths at a time when we already have the worst asbestos mortality rates in the world.”

Notes to Editors

1. Asbestos, an acknowledged carcinogen, has created the Europe’s most deadly epidemic of occupational disease. Exposure to asbestos can cause a variety of diseases: lethal cancers and severely debilitating respiratory conditions.
2. After more than a century, the use of asbestos was finally banned in EU member states by Annex 1 of Directive 76/769/EEC (1999) on dangerous substances and preparations. From January 1, 2005, the use of asbestos and asbestos-containing products was prohibited with minor derogations.
3. In “Eliminating occupational cancer in Europe,” the authors stated that: “The combined number of deaths will amount to 46,919 lung cancer and mesothelioma deaths caused by asbestos [annually], which still misses other work-related cancers caused by asbestos, such as larynx and ovary, and possibly stomach, colorectal and pharynx cancers.”
4. For more information, please contact:
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