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Asbestos Victims Support Groups Forum UK

Press Release

No Embargo

“1st July” Protest Canada’s Bloody Day of Shame

Asbestos Victims will gather in Trafalgar Square on the 1st of July Canada Day from 10am to 12 noon, to accuse the Canadian Government of having blood on its hands from its continuing export of the killer dust, asbestos, to developing countries.

The Quebec Government is considering a request from Jeffrey Mine Inc. for a loan guarantee of \$58 million to enable the company to open a new, underground asbestos mine. The company plans to export 200,000 tonnes of asbestos a year to developing countries.

Anne Oldham from Greater Manchester, whose husband died from mesothelioma, and who will be attending the protests, says:

“Sixty percent of the asbestos used in the UK was imported from Canada and very likely killed my husband and thousands of others. It is a crime to continue to export this deadly substance to developing countries which have little means of protection when it has been banned in most European countries. This is Canada’s Day of Shame.”

Tony Whitston, Forum Chair, says:

“In Quebec, asbestos is almost never used because it poses too high a risk and because Canada is suffering an epidemic of asbestos-related diseases. It is morally indefensible to export asbestos to developing countries when it is deemed too dangerous to use in developed economies, even those with sophisticated means of protection.”

Notes to Editors

Mesothelioma is a fatal tumour found principally in the lung pleura whose only known cause is exposure to asbestos. Average life expectancy from diagnosis is 12 months.

The Quebec government’s own health authority (the National Public Health Institute of Quebec), as well as Quebec health experts, all oppose the Quebec government’s policy of increased use of chrysotile asbestos.

The Canadian Medical Association, the Canadian Cancer Society, the Canadian Public Health Association, as well as the World Health Organisation and the International Labour Organisation, have all called for the use of chrysotile asbestos to end as the only way to eliminate asbestos-related diseases. The Québec government and the Canadian government refuse to listen.

In Québec itself, the government’s Occupational Health & Safety Commission (CSST) has a policy of “zero exposure” to chrysotile asbestos for Québec workers. However, the Québec government says that exposure to high levels of asbestos (1 f/cc, which is a ten times greater exposure level than permitted by provinces across Canada, by the US and by industrialized countries and a hundred times higher than that permitted by a number of countries) is perfectly

safe for people overseas.

Workers in India have written to Premier Charest saying that his government's double standard seems to be an example of racism.

In Québec, the government has published a report by its own health authorities on a two-year investigation on use of asbestos in Québec. The report found that asbestos is virtually no longer being used in Québec, but that in the tiny number of workplaces where it was still being used, there was a 100% failure rate to practise "safe use" standards.

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