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Canada still one of world's largest exporters of Chrysotile asbestos

National health organizations are calling on governments to ban the use and export of asbestos

OTTAWA, June 30 /CNW Telbec/ - The Canadian Public Health Association (CPHA), the Canadian Medical Association (CMA) and the National Specialty Society for Community Medicine (NSSCM) are calling on the federal and provincial governments to stop mining asbestos and to ban its use and export.

Canada continues to provide financial support for the asbestos industry and actively promotes Canadian exports to the remaining markets for asbestos - developing countries that lack regulations, occupational health and safety resources, and public awareness to protect asbestos workers and their families.

"More than 40 countries, including all member states of the European Union, have banned the use of all forms of asbestos, including Chrysotile," said Dr. Cordell Neudorf, Chair of the CPHA Board of Directors. "There is clear scientific evidence that exposure to asbestos through mining, processing and use is harmful to health," he added.

Although Canada has strict restrictions on the domestic use of asbestos under the Hazardous Products Act and the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, it is the world's fifth-largest exporter of Chrysotile asbestos to developing countries. Ninety six per cent of the output from the country's two remaining mines, both in Quebec, is for export, primarily to developing countries such as India and Indonesia.

Asbestos fibres remain in the body, therefore each exposure increases the likelihood of developing an asbestos-related disease such as lung cancer, scarring of the lungs and mesothelioma (cancer of the lining of the chest or abdominal cavity).

"It's inconceivable that we would restrict the use of asbestos in our own country but continue to export this hazardous product around the world," says Dr. Anne Doig, President of the Canadian Medical Association.

CPHA, CMA and the NSSCM noted that the Government of Quebec intends to guarantee a \$58-million loan to Jeffrey Mine that will result in the export of large quantities of asbestos to developing countries for the next twenty-five years.

Rather than investing in asbestos extraction and export, all levels of government should direct new investments to support the transition of asbestos mining regions toward environmentally healthy and sustainable industries. "The decision is simple: Choose to invest tax payer's dollars to diversify the economy of the regions and to re-train those currently employed by the declining asbestos industry," said Dr. Matthew Hodge, President of NSSCM.

As health professionals, we believe that the health consequences of public policy must be a key determinant of its implementation. Canada's must eliminate asbestos production and exportation and encourage economic activity that does not endanger the public's health.

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