

April 26, 2011

Open Letter to Prime Minister Harper

Dear Prime Minister Harper:

We urge you to put people's lives ahead of politics. Please end your support for the deadly asbestos trade.

Canada's leading medical authorities have all told you that Canada's export of asbestos is medically and morally indefensible and will lead to an epidemic of asbestos-related disease and death overseas.

We are shocked and dismayed that you are denying the clear scientific evidence and instead are supporting a plan to revive Canada's bankrupt, dying and deadly asbestos industry.

Public policy should be based on science, not politics. The science is indisputable that all asbestos is deadly. Not a single reputable authority supports your claim that chrysotile asbestos (which represents 100% of the global asbestos trade) can be safely used.

Canada is becoming known as an immoral asbestos pusher and as an enemy of global public health. This is not the role Canadians want to play in the world. This does not reflect Canadian values.

We are appalled that, in order to protect the asbestos industry, you have publicly promised to block the upcoming Conference of the U.N. Environmental Convention (Rotterdam Convention) so as to prevent chrysotile asbestos being listed as a hazardous substance. Chrysotile asbestos is a hazardous substance under Canadian law. It is, in our opinion, hypocritical and contemptuous of the lives of people in the developing world to prevent them from being provided with this critical information, as if their lives were less worthy of protection.

It is with sorrow and shame that we note that Canada is becoming a pariah on the international stage for its obstruction of global efforts to protect health, human rights and the environment.

Prime Minister Harper, you are the only national leader in Canada and in the Western world to promote asbestos. At the same time, Canadian taxpayers are paying millions of dollars to remove asbestos from your official residence and your place of work, the Parliament Buildings, in order to protect you and other Canadian politicians from being harmed by exposure to asbestos.

This election is about trust and integrity. We urgently call on you to show integrity. We ask you to:

- Respect the science
- Put human life ahead of partisan political interests

- Support a ban on asbestos and the provision of transition assistance to the last remaining asbestos miners and their community
- Support the listing of chrysotile asbestos under the Rotterdam Convention
- Adopt a comprehensive strategy to address Canada's asbestos disease crisis

We request a response from you. Please do not, as usually happens, forward our letter to Christian Paradis, the Minister of Natural Resources, who is an avid supporter of the asbestos industry and simply puts forward its discredited position.

We urgently await your response on this critical ethical issue.

Sincerely,



Kathleen Ruff, Senior human rights adviser, Rideau Institute

ON BEHALF OF:

Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment
 Nature Québec
 International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers, Canada
 Sierra Club Canada
 International Longshore & Warehouse Union Canada
 Maîtres chez nous-21e siècle, Québec
 Syndicat des débardeurs de Montréal, SCFP Section locale 375
 British Columbia & Yukon Territory Building & Construction Trades Council
 Prevent Cancer Now
 Atlantic Coast District, International Longshoremen's Association
 Canadian Society for Asbestos Victims
 MiningWatch Canada
 Asbestos-related Research, Education and Advocacy Fund
 Boilermakers Lodge 359
 Sheet Metal Local 280
 International Union of Bricklayers and Allied Craftworkers Union Local #2 BC
 BC Ferry & Marine Worker's Union
 IBEW Local 993, Northern B.C. & Yukon
 I L A, Local 1657, Montréal
 International Union of Operating Engineers, Local 115

ADDENDUM

1) Reputable Scientific Organisations that Oppose your position on chrysotile asbestos:

The Canadian Medical Association
The Canadian Cancer Society
The Lung Association of Canada
The Quebec Medical Association
The Canadian Public Health Association
The Quebec Association for Public Health
The Quebec Association of Physicians Specializing in Community Health
The Lung Association of Quebec
The National Specialty Society for Community Medicine
The National Public Health Institute of Quebec
The Quebec Association for Occupational Hygiene, Health & Safety
All the Quebec government's sixteen regional Directors of Public Health
The Quebec College of Physicians
The College of Family Physicians of Canada
The Quebec College of Family Physicians
The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
The International Social Security Association
The International Labour Organization
The International Commission on Occupational Health
The World Health Organization

2) Reputable Scientific Organisations that Support your position on chrysotile asbestos:

ZERO