

“It’s time to put human health ahead of asbestos” over 200 health advocates tell Prime Minister Harper

Harper government overruled Health Canada’s advice not to block UN Convention, document reveals.

[In an Open Letter, released today](#), over two hundred environmental groups, labour unions and scientists from Asia, Africa, North & South America and Europe, call on PM Harper to stop preventing the UN Rotterdam Convention from adding chrysotile asbestos to its list of hazardous substances. Chrysotile asbestos represents 100% of the global asbestos trade. The Convention promotes responsible trade by requiring that “prior informed consent” be obtained before a country exports a hazardous substance on its list.

[A document obtained by Ken Rubin under Access to Information](#), reveals that Health Canada (HC) recommended that Canada support the listing of chrysotile asbestos, but was overruled. “HC’s preferred position would be to list – as this is consistent with controlled use – i.e. let people know about the substance so they have the information they need, thru prior informed consent, to ensure they handle and use the substance correctly,” states the memo from Paul Glover of Health Canada. “We want to contribute health advice, but acknowledge the final decision will not be made on the basis of health alone,” said Glover.

The Convention’s Chemical Review Committee has repeatedly called for chrysotile asbestos to be put on the list, but Canada has refused. The issue will be brought forward again at a UN Conference in Geneva June 20-24. PM Harper and Minister Christian Paradis have said that Canada will continue to block the listing.

By preventing people from being informed that chrysotile asbestos is hazardous, Canada is betraying science, human health and common decency,” said Dr Fernand Turcotte, Professor Emeritus of Public Health, Laval University. “Quebec’s public health leaders, as well as Amnesty International in Quebec, are today calling for Canada to respect the right to health and to non-discrimination and to support the listing of chrysotile asbestos.”

“Chrysotile asbestos is listed as a hazardous substance in Canadian law,” said Dr Jean Zigby, president, Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment. “Our government is practicing a double standard by saying it is not hazardous for people overseas.”

“By putting the interests of the asbestos industry ahead of the protection of human health and the environment, Canada is bringing shame on Canada’s international reputation,” said Kathleen Ruff, senior human rights adviser to the Rideau Institute.

“Canada’s trade union movement has fought to protect workers from asbestos harm. We demand that Canada stop blocking this basic right for people overseas,” said Laura Lozanski of the Canadian Association of University Teachers.

“We call on PM Harper to do the right thing: Support the Rotterdam Convention, not the asbestos industry,” concluded Dr Turcotte.

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