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## Zim gets nod to produce asbestos

*By Peter Matambanadzo recently in CAPE TOWN South*

**Zimbabwe has been given the green light to continue producing, using and exporting chrysotile asbestos products as long as it is in accordance with the provisions of the International Labour Organisation conventions.**

The position was adopted at the end of a two-day meeting of the Zimbabwe-South Africa Joint Taskforce on chrysotile asbestos in Cape Town.

"The joint technical taskforce recognises and respects that Zimbabwe still produces, uses and exports and handles chrysotile asbestos related products in accordance with the provisions of their own laws and international conventions such as the ILO conventions 162 and 155," a joint statement read.

The two sections of the ILO conventions stipulate that countries mining asbestos should do so responsibly. The sections also call for protection of people from environmental health risk, occupational related and any other diseases.

Zimbabwe and South Africa also agreed to work on a framework that allows the two countries to work together in coming up with safety regulations and guidelines on the use of alternatives to replace white asbestos.

"The taskforce urges to work together to come up with legislation that ensures that the two countries are able to identify possible alternatives as in their endeavours to protect their workers from environmental health risks and occupational hazards," said the statement.

The two countries also pledged to work closely in the new fibre technology, which have been proposed as substitutes for white asbestos. The countries will particularly look at the occupational and environmental health risk factors of the fibre implements.

The joint taskforce recommended both governments to implement legislation that ensures the physical, sound and psychological well being of their people both at work and in the community in general with due regard to new technology with its occupational and environmental health risk factors.

Turnall managing director Mr John Jere welcomed the decision by SA to defer the ban, saying it allowed the SADC region to contribute in the changeover process from asbestos to fibre technology.

"Looking at what's happening, it is a landmark decision process and it is critical for the region to participate in the changeover process," Mr Jere said.

"It is important that as an industry we participate in this process by putting our input." He also said Turnall — one of the biggest producers of asbestos products — would continue mining and using white asbestos as consultations continue.

SA is set to ban the continued use of asbestos but the government had resolved to take back the draft legislation for public comment. SA's Department of Environment and Tourism director spearheading the legislation process against asbestos trade, Dr Nzuki Gwayi, said SA would look at the regulations on the transportation of asbestos through South Africa.

She said Zimbabwe would not be barred from mining or using asbestos but this remained to Zimbabwe to decide. Chrysotile is the only type of asbestos that remains on the market today and is mined in Zimbabwe, Russia, Brazil, Canada and China. It is widely used in the manufacture of brake pads, water pipes and irrigation systems and currently makes up to 90 percent of roofing in the region.

This type of asbestos is usually confused with the blue and brown types of asbestos, which are banned because they are harmful to human health.