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## **End asbestos use and export says Toxic Free Canada**

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Statistics showing that asbestos-related cancer and lung disease are the leading cause of occupational death in British Columbia is just one example of the continuing problem with the deadly mineral across the country, the health-environmental group Toxic Free Canada said today.

And the problem extends beyond our border because the federal government continues to support the export of asbestos to developing countries, the group said. WorkSafeBC figures for 2007 - the most recent year available - show that of 140 fatalities in B.C. industry, 56 were the result of asbestos-related occupational disease. The main cause was mesothelioma, a cancer of the lining of the body cavity, which is almost exclusively linked to asbestos exposure.

"Asbestos disease fatality is the leading cause of death due to occupational diseases in virtually every provincial compensation system," said Larry Stoffman, an occupational health expert and a director of Toxic Free Canada.

The recorded number of workplace death due to asbestos exposure is actually only a fraction of total number of cases. A recent review conducted by the University of B.C. Health Services and the School of Environmental Health found that only one-third of mesothelioma cases were actually compensated - indicating that the disease is three times as prevalent as workplace statistics show.

"Canada is in the midst of an asbestos disease epidemic with increasing incidence of cancer and respiratory disease due to past exposures," added Dr. Jim Brophy, an occupational health researcher and a director of Toxic Free Canada. "The federal and provincial governments need to take immediate steps to document possible populations at risk. We need a proper surveillance program, and a national asbestos disease registry and the end of decades long export and use of asbestos."

Despite the death toll from asbestos, Canada has refused to halt the export of Canadian-mined asbestos to developing countries where it used in construction materials and causes thousands of deaths annually.

Briefing papers recently obtained under Access to Information showed that Canadian officials blocked listing of chrysotile asbestos on the Rotterdam Convention on Prior Informed Consent in November. Listing on the convention list would have required Canada to inform all importing countries of the health effects of asbestos. But Canada joined six other countries in blocking the listing.

Toxic Free Canada has joined other organization in Canada in calling for action by both provincial governments and the federal government to end asbestos mining in Canada.

"BC has shown leadership in prohibiting uranium mining and exploration. The provincial government should do the same with asbestos which has killed hundreds of BC workers from cancer and asbestosis (as well as killing their family members from second-hand exposure from clothing)," said Toxic Free Canada director Cathy Walker, the former occupational health and safety director for the Canadian Auto Workers. "Mining production, use and export of asbestos must be banned to prevent future deaths here and in developing countries where, shamefully, Canadian asbestos continues to be exported."

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