

HEED STUDENTS AND BAN CANADIAN ASBESTOS, SAY HEALTH, ENVIRONMENT AND SOCIAL JUSTICE ORGANIZATIONS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: OTTAWA, June 1, 2009 - A number of Canada's foremost health, environment and labour organizations are urging Canadian Parliamentarians to heed the call to ban Canadian asbestos being brought to Ottawa by three Grade 10 students from northern British Columbia. The students - Hayley McDermid, Claire Hinchliffe and Chloe Staiger, have written a bill to end Canada's mining and export of asbestos to developing countries. Their Member of Parliament, Nathan Cullen, is presenting their bill in the House of Commons today.

"We support these students one hundred per cent," said Diana Daghofer, Co-Chair of Prevent Cancer Now. "We hope that Canada's political leaders are listening to them and to the massive Canadian and international backing for a ban on the production, use and export of this deadly substance."

"Canadians should be very proud of the initiative taken by these students," states Kathleen Cooper of the Canadian Environmental Law Association. "We must also direct resources and assistance to affected communities in Canada, and stop continuing to support a toxic and dying industry."

"It is time to end the double standard whereby we export a product that we refuse to use in Canada because of the threat we know it poses to public health," said Kathleen Ruff of the Rideau Institute on International Affairs.

"Asbestos-related disease is the biggest occupational killer in Canada," said occupational health expert Dr. James Brophy. "We need to stop mining and exporting it; we need a national registry and we need to help those who are living the tragedy of asbestos-related disease."

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Supported by: Prevent Cancer Now, Ban Asbestos Canada, Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment, [Canadian Auto Workers](#), Canadian Environmental Law Association, Canadian Teachers Federation, Saunders-Matthey Cancer Prevention Coalition, Toxic-Free Canada, Ontario College of Family Physicians, Canadian Association of University Teachers, Ecojustice, MiningWatch Canada, Canadian Institute for Environmental Law and Policy, Women's Healthy Environments Network, Rideau Institute for International Affairs, Clean Production Action, Breast Cancer Action Montreal

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BACKGROUND NOTES

- The three Grade 10 students from Smithers, B.C. won a Create Your Canada contest, organized by MP Nathan Cullen and aimed at involving young people in Canada's parliamentary process. Out of the 80 submissions, a panel of community leaders selected a winning entry from one junior and one senior school.
- The government continues to support Canada's asbestos trade, claiming that, although our asbestos is known to cause cancer, rigorous safety standards exist in developing countries to which Canada exports over 95% of its asbestos, and therefore it poses no risk.
- A two-year study published by the Quebec government shows that in the tiny number of industrial plants in Quebec still using asbestos, there was a 100% failure rate to follow safety standards. "If in an advanced, regulated, industrialized society, like Quebec, we find a 100% failure to implement safety controls, it lacks credibility to say such controls are implemented in developing countries," says Ramsey Hart of MiningWatch.
- In Canada, asbestos-related disease is the most significant contributor to occupational mortality. A 2004 report found rates of mesothelioma among men in Quebec to be 9.5 times greater than for the rest of Canada and the rate for women to be amongst the highest in the world.ⁱ It is estimated that 1,500 workers in BC alone will die from asbestos-caused disease over the next five years. Asbestos continues to pose a health hazard, particularly in schools, as well as in many deteriorating homes on First Nations reserves.
- The World Bank has just issued Guidelines calling for no use of asbestos in any of the projects it funds around the world. The Canada Green Buildings Council, in its LEED (Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design) standards, forbids use of asbestos in all new construction. The Canadian government has committed itself to following these standards and is also spending millions of dollars to remove asbestos from the House of Commons.
- The last functioning asbestos mine, LAB Chrysotile Inc. recently filed for bankruptcy protection. A just released study, carried out by Laval University students, shows impressive success by this asbestos-mining region of Quebec in diversifying its economy away from asbestos. The newly-named region - Appalaches - now employs about 400 workers, or 7 per cent of its workers in asbestos mining, rather than the one-third employed in the industry in 1970.

For further information, including the positions of various political parties, please go to www.preventcancer.ca

ⁱ INSPQ, The Epidemiology of Asbestos-Related Diseases in Quebec, 2004; <http://hesa.etui-rehs.org/uk/dossiers/files/293-EpidemiologyAsbestosQuebec.pdf>