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The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, P.C., M.P.
Prime Minister of Canada
Langevin Block
Ottawa, Ontario
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Transmission: Original by email

Re: Occupational and environmental exposure to asbestos fibers and elongated mineral particles in Canada – Proposal to establish a concerted Federal-Provincial-Territorial research program towards the mitigation of health and economic impacts of asbestos in the future in Canada

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau:

Over the past few months you have received numerous letters from Canadians calling on your government to implement a comprehensive asbestos ban.

Our association, the [Canadian Association for Research on Work and Health](#) (CARWH) is a not-for-profit association of researchers from universities and research centers across Canada. Founded in 2001, CARWH's mission is to enhance and promote research on workplace health, safety, and well-being in Canada and to advocate for research on how work and work environments can be altered to improve health, safety, and wellness among Canadians. We are calling on you to act toward the protection of the health of Canadian workers who are, most often inadvertently, exposed to asbestos.

The current situation

The CAREX Canada project, a national carcinogen surveillance program led by researchers from several Canadian universities, estimated that approximately 152,000 Canadians were still exposed to asbestos in their workplace in 2006. Exposed workers are employed as specialty trade contractors, in building construction, in automotive repair and maintenance, in ship and boat building and in remediation and other waste management (http://www.carexcanada.ca/en/asbestos/occupational_estimate/).

The Burden of Occupational Cancer study, led by Cancer Care Ontario's Occupational Cancer Research Center, attributes approximately 1,900 lung cancers and 430 mesotheliomas to occupational asbestos exposure each year in Canada; this accounts for 8% of all lung cancers and 81% of all mesotheliomas diagnosed annually. These numbers do not include other asbestos-related cancers and diseases.

The impact of asbestos restrictions

Restrictions on many uses of asbestos started in the 1970s and continued in the late 1980s. Asbestos has been widely used in many building construction materials – insulation, drywall, ceiling and floor tiles, old electrical products, drain pipes, and more. Exposures during manufacturing of these products has stopped, but now most exposures take place during removal and renovation in buildings.

However, a few products like asbestos pipes and certain types of truck brake pads continue to be imported and used in Canada, exposing workers and consumers during installation, maintenance and repair.

What next?

For many years the Chrysotile Institute (formerly the Asbestos Institute) received subsidies from the federal and the Quebec governments. We feel it is now time for our governments to help foster research on: 1. effective methods to identify where asbestos can be found, and who has been exposed; 2. better diagnosis and treatment of asbestos-related diseases and on surveillance programs that will adequately measure the impact of these measures; and 3. adequate exposure abatement methods for workers to safely remove and dispose of asbestos containing material.

For example, about 300,000 homes on First Nation reserves and military bases in Canada may contain asbestos insulation. An exhaustive inventory of homes and buildings is necessary in order to determine the impact of asbestos on First Nation communities and military forces and their families.

Examples of research needs identified a few years ago by the US National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health include the development of a broader understanding of the important determinants of toxicity for asbestos fibers and other mineral fibers that are similar in shape (elongate mineral particles, EMPs); the Development of Information and Knowledge on Occupational Exposures to Asbestos Fibers and Other EMPs and Related Health Outcomes; and the Development of Improved Sampling and Analytical Methods for Asbestos Fibers and Other EMPs. (<https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/2011-159/pdfs/2011-159.pdf>)

Research needs concerning asbestos are immense, and unfortunately, funding for applied research is scarce. This is especially true for what is considered an “old” problem, as now asbestos mines have all closed in Canada and several restrictions on its use have been applied.

How to do it?

Research needs are vast in several areas and public funds are not infinite. As a starting point, exploring the approach used in Australia – a country with a dreadful heritage of asbestos mining and use – can be inspiring and save time and resources. Following the recommendation of a national asbestos management review, the Australian government has established a National Strategic Plan for Asbestos Management and Awareness (<https://www.asbestossafety.gov.au/national-strategic-plan>), in which research is one of the six strategies put forward.

In conclusion

Research is only one of the strategies to address the asbestos legacy in Canada, albeit a major one. As a Canadian association of researchers, CARWH welcomes any effort by the federal government to foster a collaborative research environment to help address the ongoing impact of asbestos-related disease.



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