

REGISTERED

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Madam, Sir,

On December 15 2016, the Canadian government announced its pan governmental approach to asbestos management in Canada. Under the aegis of the Environment and Climate Change and Health departments, this project's goal would be to develop a draft regulation document that, in conformity with the Canadian Environmental Protection act (1999), would ban all new activities related to asbestos and asbestos-containing products. That would include the fabrication, use, sale, sale offer, importation and exportation of asbestos.

I am a Canadian citizen and I live in Adstock, a municipality close to Thetford Mines, Quebec. I have worked on the asbestos fibre file for more than 40 years and I have an in-depth knowledge of all the amphibole and serpentine fibres-related issues, including the well-established differences between the different types of fibres in terms of their chemical structure and their real hazardousness for people's health and the environment. I am also the President of the International Chrysotile Association (ICA), a reputable, well-known organization both in Quebec and Canada. I am also familiar with all issues pertaining to the potential risks associated with the use of alternative fibres and products.

The ICA is a private, international, not-for-profit organization whose aim is to promote a controlled, responsible and safe use of the natural chrysotile fibre, a well-known mineral which has now been used in a very responsible manner for several decades.

Since the beginning of the 80s, successive Canadian governments have defended and **wholeheartedly supported the safe use of all minerals and metals, including of course the use and production of the mineral fibre called chrysotile. Through the Chrysotile Institute, a tripartite organization (governments, unions, industry), the federal and Quebec governments invested more than C\$55 millions to ensure the promotion and defense of the program for the safe, controlled and responsible use of chrysotile, with remarkable success.** I would like to remind you that the issue was always defended with

conviction by our political representatives, namely by Minister Ralph Goodale in his presentation at the Chrysotile Symposium that was held in Montreal in 1997.

For years I was a board member at the Institute and I can proudly bear witness to the exemplary collective will, actions and efforts that went into developing ways to safely use this natural fibre, here and around the world. Of course, as any other mineral or metal extracted and used here in Canada, it carries a certain level of risk for human health. However, when it comes to safe and controlled use, science teaches us that when a person is exposed to an environment containing 1f/cc of chrysotile, the risk for human health is so low that it becomes, for all intents and purposes, non measurable. It is on that basis that I now allow myself to intercede with the authorities responsible for the Canadian government's chemical products management plan.

I therefore wish to intervene officially and hereby present you with a certain number of important issues, with the hope of prompting the responsible Canadian authorities to conduct a rigorous analysis of this file. It is of utmost importance that a scientific analysis be conducted in order to allow for a well-informed decision on asbestos and chrysotile.

THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN (SERPENTINE) CHRYSOTILE AND AMPHIBOLE ASBESTOS

Asbestos is the only word that is found in each and every document received from or published by the government on the Internet. However, asbestos is not in itself a mineral: this is both a scientific and geological mistake. Rather, asbestos is a collective term used to describe a group of minerals whose crystals occur in fibrous form. The term was adopted decades ago for the purpose of commercial identification and is no longer relevant.

It is a well-known fact that in today's world the serpentine fibre, chrysotile, is the only one being commercialized. The use of other, amphibole-type fibres has to all intents and purposes been abandoned, around the world. To confuse them when avoiding this distinction is also a mistake. Any serious research will reveal the existence of two distinct groups of fibres called "asbestos": serpentine (chrysotile) and the amphiboles (actinolite, anthophyllite, crocidolite, tremolite, etc.). While both are silicate-based minerals, their chemical and mineralogical properties differ widely. You will find attached a study that was prepared by a group of scientists specialized in this issue for the Chrysotile Institute. It provides an impressive amount of information on each type of fibre. Competent authorities should acknowledge these facts and give them their full consideration.

THE CRUSADE

For more than a year, we have bore witness to the numerous efforts of the anti-asbestos lobby and their supporters who have engaged in what can only be described as a Canadian crusade for the banishment of asbestos (including chrysotile) by the government of Canada. They demand the elimination of all present and future risks (zero risk policy) associated with chrysotile and want the government to accept new responsibility principles in the management of this natural resource.

The *Globe and Mail*, an authoritative English Canadian daily, has willingly become the crusade's vehicle of choice. It has namely published data on Canadian imports of asbestos and asbestos-containing products which our own data sincerely leads us to question. We also believe that the departments that are responsible for gathering such data and statistics are well aware of the dubious nature of the information published and endlessly repeated in the crusaders' propaganda. Furthermore, on this very subject, it is significant to note the recent declaration published by the leaders of the Canadian automotive sector who informed the public that the industry abandoned the use of "asbestos" containing brakes years ago. This doesn't stop activists nor the *Globe and Mail* from disseminating different information and declarations. Such discrepancies should be a source of concern for our country's governmental authorities. It is clearly one of the dubious component of the anti-asbestos crusade.

Another source of preoccupation – or one that should be for the government – is the information one can find on the RightOnCanada website, dated August 17 2016, in a declaration by Kathleen Ruff, a well-known anti-asbestos crusader, who writes "I was glad to receive a phone call from a policy advisor for Minister Philpott and have a constructive and positive dialogue about the work that is currently being done in preparation for an upcoming announcement regarding the asbestos policy of the new Trudeau government."

That is very intriguing. How is it that, when envisaging new legislation that could potentially brutally impact on a whole, huge region – ours, in fact – policy-makers could have decided to inform or feed anti-asbestos spokespersons before discussing the issue with Members of Parliament from the Thetford Mines and Asbestos areas, concerned municipal leaders, organizations such as local Chambers of Commerce or the Pro-Chrysotile Movement? How could it be that they neglected, first and foremost, to inform the Quebec government? Should this really have happened, such disrespect of basic democratic principles and of democratically elected local and provincial authorities cannot be ignored. Such shameless attitude and inconceivable information-sharing looks very much like contempt for our democratic institutions.

We can only hope that Mrs Ruff's statement was only a figment of her imagination - it would not have been a first - but the announcement made by four (4) Cabinet ministers during what strangely looked like a staged media spectacle left us wondering, deeply worried and perplexed. The first victims of such a decision, who are the region's communities, will have learned of their government's plans through the media and RightOnCanada. This is not very edifying and I would even say, deeply disturbing. One can reasonably think that a very fearsome and worrisome threat lies ahead.

BANISHMENT AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

Banishment if necessary, but not necessarily banishment. Such a decision, should it be made, would necessarily raise issues related to the use, importation and fabrication of replacement fibres or products. The media and anti-asbestos militant are systematically avoiding any debate on these matters. Yet, open discussions on the safety of replacement fibres and products should be at the heart of a responsible approach. Where are the robust scientific studies on these topics? We should acquire a solid understanding of all of those substitutes' characteristics, of their costs and of the extent of the existing scientific knowledge about their hazardousness or associated risks for human health. It should be added that in general, replacement fibres and products are exempted from the very rigorous norms that regulate the use of chrysotile. Canada must urgently shed some light on the new commercial world of chrysotile replacement fibres and products because if our country opts for banishment it must immediately address those issues. People's health is at stakes.

Many scientific studies have concluded that a number of these products are hazardous for human health and that in the case of many of them their dangerousness can't even be properly evaluated, for the lack of existing proper studies. To that end, one must understand that we cannot satisfy ourselves with ordinary media articles or declarations from banishment proponents: Canada must engage in a rigorous, science-based procedure that will review all aspects of the use of chrysotile fibre substitutes.

FRIVOLOUS AND ABUSIVE LEGAL PURSUITS

Countries that have banned all types of asbestos fibres have been faced with an avalanche of frivolous, abusive, never-ending and costly legal pursuits. To the great delight of businesses with huge interests in asbestos removal, anti-asbestos activists have also demanded, in the name of health, that detailed inventories be produced – very costly procedures that are often inappropriate if not totally useless. The Government of Canada cannot neglect and avoid seriously analyzing such a risk. All countries that have been through such inconveniences can bear witness to this fact.

Paralysis and demagoguery, if not outright judicial abuse, have taken up all the space. One must understand the potential scope of the anti-asbestos crusade, which includes huge vested interests that are often very different from those concerned with human health. A global banishment of this national resource by a country such as Canada will inevitably (as it was the case in other countries which followed that path) translate itself in excessive and too often unnecessary costs for our country, without even mentioning all the judicial and legislative entanglements that will arise. That road will necessarily be hazardous and filled with nearly insurmountable obstacles, and will involve costly and time-consuming expenditures while better results could be achieved by focusing efforts on the right issues and for the right reasons.

One must also be aware of the fact that militants working for the World Health Organization (WHO) or for the International Labour Organization (ILO) are solicited and use their position and their organization to call for banishment, without any reservations, even if the authorities of such organizations, Member States, have democratically decided otherwise. Those people also work in close collaboration with the London-based International Ban Asbestos Secretariat, and speak the same language as Ms Ruff, from the Ottawa Rideau Institute. The numerous links between all these organizations dedicated to a global banishment of asbestos are easy to see.

Large law firms specialized in asbestos-related claims are also at work and their dubious methods and practices have often been denounced by mainstream media such as the *Wall Street Journal*. Over the past few years, fraudsters have been sued and imprisoned. Many actors are involved and, as can be seen, there are a lot of interests at stake. In these lucrative sagas of often questionable morality, the real victims are frequently left behind. One must note that the anti-asbestos militants have never denounced this human drama. Their silence speaks volumes.

OUR LOGICAL RESPONSE

If we want to protect people's health and fight asbestos-related diseases, as the WHO wishes, we must prioritize safe use and agree to do so while respecting the differentiation that must be done between the different types of fibres. The response doesn't lie in the product's banishment but in prohibiting inappropriate extraction methods and uses. The principle of safe and controlled use is plain common sense, even if it is not the one preferred by anti-asbestos crusaders, whose demands are pushing in the opposite direction.

Let me emphasize, for example, that the main cause of asbestos related health problems is nowadays well-known; it is the use of amphiboles, in particular of crocidolite (blue

asbestos) which many scientific studies have demonstrated to be 500 times more toxic than the serpentine fibre – chrysotile. That is why we have so many times underlined how important it is to scientifically understand the well-established difference between amphiboles and serpentine. We can only hope that Canada will decide to ban amphibole asbestos fibres. The ILO's Asbestos Convention (C162) is very explicit in this regard and further recommends, as we do, the safe and controlled use of the chrysotile fibre. **The Convention also demands very specifically that all replacement products or fibres be scientifically evaluated before authorizing their use, in order to clearly demonstrate that it would be less dangerous and safer from a human health perspective.**

To make asbestos illegal without taking in consideration the context of its use will not in any way protect public health nor will it solve problems related to a fortunately bygone past. We must avoid rushing headlong because it can also create a false sense of security. The mere fact of blindly replacing chrysotile doesn't in any way constitute a real security guarantee for people. Can we pretend that the replacement products will be safe? An approach based on real prevention must be much more comprehensive and involves something other than banning a natural resource such as chrysotile, that can be used in a safe, controlled and responsible way.

Canada has the privilege of being a country blessed with abundant natural resources which also come with a certain level of risk for human health. If we agree to head towards banishing one of these resources, there is a very real risk that it will only be the first step in a long adventure: where and when will it stop? We can't be sure. Eventually, there will be potentially far-reaching implications and it would be irresponsible not to immediately take them into full consideration, before it is too late.

OUR NEIGHBOURS, AN EXAMPLE

Under the leadership of President Obama, the American government asked the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to create a list of 10 priority chemical products that should be comprehensively studied to measure the true risks associated with their use. This list was recently made public and asbestos is part of it.

What is interesting and instructive in this approach is that each listed product must be scientifically evaluated to identify its environmental hazardousness as well as to determine whether there exists an unacceptable risk level for human health. The EPA must also take into consideration issues related to the use of substitutes, their associated costs, and eventual necessary regulations. The EPA will need approximately 3 years to complete its thorough evaluation of real safety risks for human health.

It is important to remember that in the past, the United States of America did ban many friable products containing fibres and that they have also rejected practices such as flocking as well as the use of amphiboles. However, many high-density chrysotile fibre-containing products are still authorized and commercialized, since the fibres, encapsulated in a matrix, can't be airborne. Their use is regulated by many governmental agencies and their utilization is controlled.

The necessary studies and analyses will be completed using authentic, thorough and recent scientific data in order to allow for the formation of strong and justifiable opinions.

American authorities will need to allow a sufficient amount of time and work with due diligence to reach the expected results, which could take a minimum of 5 to 6 years. This approach seems, to say the least, much more balanced, realistic and responsible than the one put forward by the Government of Canada, announced with great fanfare, at the last minute, and wrapped up in a media spectacle. In fact, the presentation made by the four Ministers was evidently related to a mesothelioma case and lamentably, they all neglected to mention that many recently published scientific studies have informed us that we can no longer accuse chrysotile of being the cause of such type of cancer. Science indicates very clearly that it is caused by amphibole fibres. Not to inform the public of such distinction is clearly an error. It must quickly be corrected by our government.

We should examine closely how our neighbours and other countries currently producing and using "asbestos" are dealing with this file. It would be a much wiser approach than to bend under the pressure exerted by anti-asbestos crusaders that go as far as rejecting any discussion of control mechanisms or responsible approaches. They will never accept less than a complete banishment. Adept at controlling the media and public environment, their structure is unclear, their responsibilities diluted and with no duty of confidentiality, they create a network that proves to be a fertile ground for bureaucratic reflexes. Authorities are often weakened by such challenges and they can't properly identify the absurdities that should be rebuked to counterbalance a well-orchestrated and well-publicized crusade. This is how activists can reach their goals.

SERPENTINE RESIDUES

Upon learning through the media and the RightOnCanada website about the intentions of Canada's new government with regard to banishment without any apparent consideration for serpentine (chrysotile), our regional communities were among those who quickly mobilized and vigorously, with great determination, appealed to the Canadian government. Thetford Mines and Asbestos regional organizations, the Chambers of Commerce, business men and women, municipal authorities, the Pro-

Chrysotile Movement, elected federal and Quebec officials as well as the Quebec Government raised a flag and sent an S.O.S. to Mr Trudeau's government.

I understand that some telephone conversations took place between the Science Minister, Ms Kirsty Duncan, and some industry representatives, as well as between her and our regional Members of Parliament. However, I also took good note of an article published by Mrs H  l  ne Buzetti in *Le Devoir* on December 16, under the headline *Asbestos Residues – Ottawa Doesn't Exclude Banishing Their Exploitation*.

After perusing all available oral or written official declarations, I have been forced to conclude that to the best of my knowledge, the commitment that was said to have been made to allow for the continued exploitation of serpentine residues and for their potential development has not been put in writing. The Liberal government headed by Mr Trudeau must rapidly and officially commit itself. There is no room for deception or dithering. There would be dramatic consequences for the economic development our regions' communities should the government decide to move ahead and further away from the promise made by Minister Duncan to our local authorities with regard to the exploitation and industrial development of serpentine residues. The Government of Canada must abide by this premise which will consist in ensuring the development of this bestowed legacy. Not doing so would be akin to negating our future.

Within the broader perspective of the responsible and sustainable development of our natural resources, it is essential to take a new, constructive look that would reflect and loudly echo a determined political will towards the valorization of the residues that have been accumulated in our regions during 130 years of mineral extraction.

Local development, reduction of energy consumption, short circuit transformation of materials and the substances' second life are at the new trends of our modern societies. The use of optimal technical solutions, with a low impact on the neighbouring communities, allows for great hopes of renewal. Such is, understandably, the urgent message emanating from our regions' collectivities. If we take time to analyze existing statistics on the death of people in the regions where asbestos was extracted for many decades, we will note that their age of death is equal, if not superior to the Canadian average. So we are asking: why not disseminate this positive information?

The potential responsible use and valorization of serpentine residues could be annihilated by an arsenal of excessive regulations and our government leaders' reluctance to intervene decisively. The time has now come to recognize and accept what science is telling us, truth and facts. A true political will must manifest itself that could advance our

regions' economic development file. **This file fulfills all social acceptability requirements.** A good dose of will could quickly make a considerable difference.

For our broad region, residues are one of the available resources that truly offer huge potential for economic development. That is why authorities must take the time to fully understand what will constitute a real promise for the communities' social and economic future, not only through generating sustained economic activity but also through the creation of high-quality jobs whose benefits will contribute to creating a better quality of life while correcting the mistakes of the past.

While – regrettably – our mines are no longer exploited, a wealth of technological and scientific knowledge acquired throughout the years has demonstrated that it is possible to "safely" work with and use chrysotile, as well as products and derivatives that can contain low levels of serpentine fibres.

Consequently, the various governmental and health authorities, are invited as of now to take a joint position and bravely and openly support and promote a type of exploitation readily accessible. The weight of the political decisions made in Quebec and in Ottawa as well as the necessary, whole-hearted collaboration of health authorities are indispensable steps towards success. The challenge now lies in the urgent need to demonstrate open-mindedness, common sense, seriousness and audacity.

The big anti-asbestos lobbies have no friends. They have interests. They invest a maximum of energies in order to influence authorities in countries all around the world, including ours. Sometimes they succeed and the costs are seldom measured. The real victims are the people who live in these environments. Zeal, harassment, and the lack of empathy of some individuals working for public health organizations are factors that can readily contribute to the failure of development projects such as ours. If we eventually add a lack of political will, especially coming from departments who are directly responsible for the management of those issues, then we have a perfect recipe for disaster. In our view, to accept being instrumentalized by a powerful anti-asbestos lobby and the "litigation business" doesn't appear to be the best way to insure a possible economic and social future.

Such are the comments, suggestions and proposals that I wanted to bring to your attention before you finalize the proposition you will submit to the government. In a file as complex as the safe and controlled use of chrysotile fibre, this process should not be rushed or marred by mistakes. All precautions must be taken because whatever decision will be made will have consequences for all other minerals and metals that are exploited and used in Canada and that contribute to our collective wealth.

For your information, besides the document on the scientific analysis of the difference between serpentine (chrysotile) and amphibole fibres that I mentioned at the beginning of this letter, please allow me to attach three other documents of interest, published by the science journal Informa (2013): *Science Must Prevail*, *Science-Based Facts* and *Health Risk of Chrysotile Revisited*.

I would respectfully request that you share these documents, for review and analysis, with your experts responsible for this file. Meanwhile, please rest assured that I remain available should you wish to meet with me. I will be expecting your comments at the earliest opportunity.

Please accept, Madam, Sir, the assurances of my highest consideration.