

January 28, 2011

Ms. Linda Reinstein
Chief Executive Officer
Asbestos Disease Awareness Organization
1525 Aviation Boulevard, Suite 318
Redondo Beach CA 90278
UNITED STATES

Dear Ms. Reinstein,

At the request of Serge Simard, Minister for Natural Resources and Wildlife, I would like to reply to your recent letter addressed to Jean Charest, Premier of Québec, in which you ask him to prohibit the extraction and exporting of asbestos.

All types of asbestos are carcinogenic, including chrysotile asbestos (produced in Québec), and their use may cause illness. However, the use of chrysotile in compliance with the regulatory provisions and techniques for safe utilization does not create a significant risk for workers and users.

A wide range of substances and products in everyday use are hazardous for human health if not used in accordance with suitable standards. They include petroleum and derived products, cleaning products such as chlorine and caustic soda, and mineral substances such as silica. However, there are no calls to ban them as dangerous products.

The Québec government's position on the safe use of asbestos has been based, since 1986, on Convention 162 and Recommendation 172 of the International Labour Organization, an international agreement signed by the Government of Canada. This position stems from a large number of scientific studies that have focused on both workers and members of the general population who are exposed to asbestos and chrysotile fibres. Any substance, whether mineral or chemical, can be used safely up to a certain threshold level, under which it presents a negligible risk.

As a result, the Québec government supports the safe use of asbestos and all other dangerous substances.

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Since 1984, working in conjunction with industry, the Québec and federal governments have supported the creation of the Chrysotile Institute to collate and distribute information on asbestos and promote safe use, mainly among industry clients.

The Chrysotile Institute is active in other countries to ensure that users have access to all the information they need to use chrysotile safely and effectively.

In developing countries, where the population has restricted access to potable water and suitable housing, the use of chrysotile improves access to basic necessities. Materials based on chryso-cement are low-cost, durable, and increase comfort by making housing units more soundproof, better insulated and more rot-resistant. Other substitute materials, such as cellulose, have yet to be shown to be innocuous. A study of bio-persistence has even found that these materials are more harmful than chrysotile.

In conclusion, the Québec government is not ashamed of its actions to support the use of chrysotile, and should, in fact, be cited as an example for the way in which it supervises the industry.

Yours sincerely,

Jean-S. Lebel, ing. f.
Associate Deputy Minister for Mines