

TO: All MUNFA Members

FROM: The MUNFA Executive Committee

DATE: March 1, 2010

SUBJECT: Asbestos Use in Public Infrastructure

Attached for your information is a copy of a letter to Chief Ministers, New Delhi, India from The Collegium Ramazzini regarding asbestos use in public infrastructure in India. The Collegium Ramazzini is an independent, international academy in the fields of occupational and environmental health. It is a particularly important letter because it is highly relevant to us as Academic Staff Members (ASMs) given its recommendations spelt out for dealing with asbestos in public buildings. Since our campus was built in an era when asbestos was widely used, some of the information in this letter is relevant to our own infrastructure.

While asbestos is continually abated on our campus and might not remain a priority, it is still a highly hazardous material to which workers can experience unexpected exposure.

ASMs are encouraged to remain vigilant about the state of the infrastructure they work in and to not hesitate to report any concerns about possible asbestos contamination issues to either: 1) MUN Management, 2) Susan Knight, the new MUN Asbestos Management Coordinator and/or 3) MUNFA (munfa@mun.ca) and the MUNFA-MUN JOHSC.

It is only through a process of regular air quality testing, asbestos management, education and openness that we will be able to minimize exposure to asbestos on our campus.



COLLEGIUM RAMAZZINI

DA VENIAM SCRIPTIS QUORUM NON GLORIA NOBIS
CAUSA, SED UTILITAS OFFICIUMQUE FUIT

January 14, 2010

The Honorable Chief Minister of New Delhi
The Honorable Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit
New Delhi
INDIA

President

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Dear Chief Minister Dikshit:

I write in further follow-up to the very stimulating conversation we had about asbestos and its risks to health in the moments before the start of the medical conference that the Maulana Asad Medical College convened in New Delhi last month in partnership with the Collegium Ramazzini. Thank you so very much again for having participated in this conference and for having given so generously of your time.

My particular motive in transmitting this message is to advance the argument that you, in your capacity as Chief Minister of New Delhi are in a remarkable position of leadership to advocate for a path-breaking ban on asbestos in Delhi and thus to protect human health not only in the city of Delhi but across all of India. A highly publicized ban on new use of asbestos in Delhi would resonate across the subcontinent and build for you a spectacular legacy.

Asbestos is a proven cause of asbestosis, a fibrotic form of lung disease. Asbestos is also a proven human carcinogen. The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), the cancer agency of the World Health Organization (WHO), has formally declared that all forms of asbestos, without exception, cause cancer - specifically lung cancer, cancer of the larynx, malignant mesothelioma and cancer of the ovary. WHO has stated that all forms of asbestos are probable causes of gastrointestinal cancer.

Worldwide, asbestos has been a health hazard of catastrophic proportion. In the United States, asbestos has been responsible for over 200,000 deaths. Worldwide it will cause millions of fatalities. The profound tragedy of the asbestos epidemic is that all of the illnesses and all of the deaths caused by asbestos are entirely preventable.

To control the health hazards of asbestos, WHO has called for all countries around the world to stop all new use of all types of asbestos. To support this call for a halt on the new use of asbestos, WHO has developed a global program for the elimination of asbestos-related diseases.

The World Bank has joined WHO in recognizing the health hazards of asbestos and in acknowledging also the great burden that the diseases of asbestos impose on the world's economies. Last May, the World Bank Group published a Good Practice Note on asbestos. This 17-page document provides much useful information on safe alternatives to asbestos and on the protection of workers' health. It was produced for the World Bank by a fellow of the Collegium Ramazzini (B. Castleman).

<http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTPOPS/Resources/AsbestosGuidanceNoteFinal.pdf>

The Collegium Ramazzini has called repeatedly – in 1993, 1999 and 2004 - for all countries to ban asbestos. Virtually all of the independent organizations of the world concerned with the health and welfare of workers and the general public, such as the International Social Security Association (ISSA) have likewise called for a ban on asbestos use.

To date, 50 countries have banned all forms of asbestos, most recently Japan, South Africa and South Korea. Malaysia is expected to announce a ban within months.

Unfortunately, India remains a major user of asbestos. In India a tremendous amount of asbestos is still used today in asbestos-cement roofing and pipes. The quantity of asbestos used in India is climbing by an astounding 10-12 percent per year. This is a burgeoning tragedy. The rapidly growing use of asbestos in India will result in tens of thousands of cases of disease and many thousands of asbestos cancers. These cancers will occur in the workers who are installing, maintaining and repairing asbestos-cement roofs and pipes. Cancers and other asbestos-related diseases will result also in innocent by-standers, women and children among them. Moreover, as the asbestos-cement roofs and pipes installed today deteriorate and erode in the months and years ahead and as they undergo repair and renovation, they will release asbestos-laden dust into homes and communities across India. This contaminated and highly persistent dust will mortally endanger workers, families and children for the remainder of the century. It will create an epidemic of terrible and terribly costly disease that will cause immeasurable human suffering and hamstring India's economy.

The forces that advocate for continuing use of asbestos in India are formidable and well organized. Lies are their weapon. Manufacture of doubt is their strategy. They are deterred by neither scientific fact nor the considered rulings of the World Health Organization. Indeed, on Dec. 17, 2009, the opening morning of our conference in Delhi, the asbestos industry ran an advertisement in *Times of India* claiming, "Only safe white fibre is used in manufacture of asbestos cement products in India." This claim of safety in asbestos is an utter lie. It flies in the face of more than 50 years of solid medical science. The advertisement was strongly condemned by the conference.

Chief Minister, I would argue that this moment in time - the start of a new decade, and the immediate aftermath of our major conference in New Delhi on the health hazards of asbestos - is a propitious time to take strong action.

Under your leadership, Delhi can set an example for all of India by immediately imposing a complete and absolute ban on all use of asbestos in all new construction of public buildings. Such a ban would be an extraordinarily visible first step. It would be of great symbolic importance. It would start the entire country down a new and better path. It would begin immediately to save lives. It would be a tipping point.

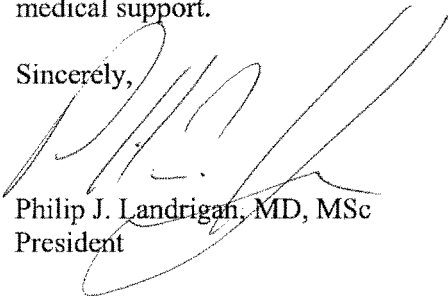
Strong next steps that could follow this initial announcement of a ban could include:

- (1) Announcement of new programs for training and protecting workers who work in buildings where asbestos materials are in-place. Public buildings such as hospitals and schools should have top-to-bottom assessments made of the presence and condition of asbestos. Such information can then guide work practices and engineering control procedures; and
- (2) Phase-out of all use of asbestos-containing products in all new construction and building renovation in Delhi.

Each of these actions would be life-saving. The force of good example would be enormous. The immediate beneficiaries will be India's workers and the ultimate beneficiaries will be India's children.

Any step you may consider to protect the citizens of Delhi from asbestos will have the full support of the Collegium Ramazzini. We stand ready to provide information, testimony and medical support.

Sincerely,



Philip J. Landrigan, MD, MSc
President

On behalf of all the fellows of the Collegium Ramazzini and especially those who were at the New Delhi conference:

Dr. Morando Soffritti, Secretary General
Dr Arthur Frank
Dr TK Joshi
Dr UK Misra
Dr Melissa McDiarmid
Dr Carol Rice
Dr Elihu Richter
Dr Knut Ringen
Dr Andrew Watterson
Dr Richard Wedeen