EXPERIENCES IN MALAYSIA ON ASBESTOS ISSUES

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Asbestos - a mineral with fibers (magnesium silicate)
"used for fireproofing, electrical insulation, building materials, brake linings, and chemical filters, the small fibres can cause cancer when lodged in the lungs"

Commercial use: asbestos cements products (roof tiles, ceilings, floor tiles) (85%); insulation materials; asbestos textiles; brake lining, gaskets and clutch plates.

EVERY year, nearly 100,000 people worldwide die from work related asbestos exposure, according to the International Labour Organisation (ILO). Asbestos related cancers expected to increase globally.

Causes of death and cancer cases......

- The UN specialised agency responsible for promoting labour standards and human rights, including safety and health at work, found corroborative evidence that the extensive use of asbestos in the 1960s and 1970s, especially in industrialised countries, lies behind many of the related cancer cases and deaths today.
ASBESTOS - a typical asbestos roof house

The Malaysian government has not ratified both the Conventions No. 162 and 139. On the 28th March 2011, the Department of Safety and Health (DOSH) has organized a forum on "the proposal to ban usage of Asbestos at work place"

Russia, Canada and China main producers. Russia consumes 60% of asbestos produced, China produces for domestic use, Canada exports 95%. Canada, the largest asbestos-exporting country dominates world trade, with an annual export of about 300,000 tons of chrysotile asbestos.

While asbestos is used in 114 countries, it is banned in 55 countries, mostly in Europe. Countries including the US, Canada, Brazil, China, Indonesia and Malaysia allow its use in some products.

Asbestos use in Malaysia

- Asbestos is not mined in Malaysia
- In commercial use since 1950s
- Joint venture companies established with companies from Japan and Australia
- South Pacific Asbestos Association established in 1984 when discussions on Asbestos Regulations 1986 held
- Asbestos used in manufacture of asbestos cement products (roofing, flat sheets, pipes), friction materials and gaskets

40 years ago, hazards on the use of Asbestos was known in all other countries. But In Malaysia, the use of Asbestos became increasingly popular among the manufacturing and building industry in the late 19th century and has continued peaking in the mid 20th due to its resistance to heat, electricity and chemicals apart from acoustic properties and tensile strength. Its use was later discouraged as inhalation of asbestos fibres posed a health hazard.
While asbestos continues to be used there are efforts by
the government, the construction industry and the building
materials industry to go asbestos free. Enlightened
property developers have already moved towards the use
of asbestos free building materials. However asbestos
cement products continue to be used in low cost housing.
The government has clearly indicated in their contract
guidelines that asbestos is not to be used in the
construction of government quarters and public buildings.
- Prohibition of the use of Crocidolite chemicals in workplace
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In Malaysia…

Two Australian companies and one Japanese
Company shifted their production to Malaysia to
produce Asbestos products on roofing sheets and
ceilings. Due to the limited knowledge of the
hazards of Asbestos in Malaysia, the government
being keen to create job opportunities allowed
these industries to operate. We are not sure if
Malaysia was aware of these hazards at that time??

In Malaysia…..

As the international experience became well known
and international trade union campaigns also spread
all over the world including Malaysia, MTUC and unions
also intensified their campaigns on the ban.

At the height of the campaign some 15 years ago,
Asbestos producing companies changed their names.
Eg. United Asbestos Corporation changed its name to
UAC Sdn. Bhd. The word Asbestos was taken off but
they still produced Asbestos!!!!

The Company claimed that they are no longer
producing Asbestos for roofing sheets but using
alternate materials - this needs to be verified and
confirmed!!!!!!

Status of asbestos use in workplace

Workplaces involved in using asbestos

- Non-Factory (2)
  - Factories currently using asbestos (8)
  - Factories that had used asbestos (7)

Total number of employees in 8 Factories
currently using asbestos (2136)

Types of asbestos employees exposed to

- Chrysotile (brake, roof) – 1951
- Fibrous anthrophylite (roof) – 185

Asbestos related diseases which eventually KILLS

- Specific – Asbestosis, Mesothelioma,
  Pleural plaques
- Non-specific – Lung cancer, Diffuse Pleural
  thickening, Pleural effusion,
  Rounded atelectasis
- Increased risk of lung cancer in asbestos exposed
  workers (5 X).
Legislative Framework to Control Asbestos Related Diseases

- ILO Asbestos Convention 1986
- OSHA (USA) Asbestos Standard 1986
- Malaysia Factories and Machinery (Asbestos Process) Regulations 1986
- SH (Use and Standards of Exposure to Chemicals Hazardous to Health Regulations) 2000 – USECHH 2000
- Compensable in Employment Injury Insurance Scheme under Employees Social Security Act

Global campaign

The International Labour Organisation and the World Health Organisation have endorsed a global campaign for the elimination of asbestos-related diseases and this is to be carried out by stopping the use of all types of asbestos. More than 55 countries have heeded this call.

"ILO has confirmed that it wants to see the elimination of asbestos use worldwide, full stop,” she said. ITUC General Secretary Sharan Burrow

It is imperative that Malaysia joins this global campaign to ban the use of all types of asbestos and not bow to pressure by groups that place financial gains before public health

MTUC’s Role in the campaign on the total ban of Asbestos

In view of the threat posed by the use of asbestos, MTUC has taken several steps including calling on the government for the total ban of Asbestos in Malaysia.

- The Malaysian Trades Unions Congress (MTUC) conducted a study on the use of Asbestos in workplaces.
- MTUC and trade unions carried out extensive training particularly among industrial workers on the hazards of Asbestos and safe use of Asbestos - how to use and the protective measures.
- Information on international experiences and findings of extensive studies carried out was disseminated.
MTUC's Role in the campaign on the total ban of Asbestos

INTERNATIONAL WORKERS MEMORIAL DAY

- For the last 15 years, MTUC has been observing the International Workers' Memorial Day, a day set aside to honour those who have died of work-related accidents or occupational illnesses.

- On 28th July 2011 MTUC together with Building Workers International (BWI) held a Forum on Asbestos at the MTUC. There was a presentation of a Memorandum to the Deputy Minister of Human Resources "On Total Ban of Asbestos in Malaysia"

MTUC Calls for Asbestos Ban

- The Malaysian Trade Unions Congress (MTUC) launched a signature campaign on 28th April 2008 demanding the government to impose a full ban on the use of asbestos in the construction and manufacturing sectors by 2010. The announcement by the MTUC came on International Workers' Memorial Day, a day set aside to honor those who have died of work-related accidents or occupational illnesses.

- Besides imposing a ban, make available a national registry for asbestosis and mesothelioma, early diagnosis of asbestos-related diseases and implement a workers' compensation scheme.

- Embark on an asbestos awareness and education program to impart the message to the public, contractors, mechanics, plumbers and workers in general about hazards of asbestos and to encourage compliance with regulations and safe asbestos management practices.

At the campaigns MTUC voiced out that....

"Malaysia till now has only come up with regulations on the safe use of asbestos but that is not enough. In fact, there is no such thing as safe asbestos. There is no safe level of exposure to asbestos, irrespective of the type of asbestos, technological adaptations or workplace precautions. In order to avoid the deleterious effects of asbestos, it is imperative that its use be totally banned"
Conclusion
- MTUC and all its affiliates reiterates its calls to the government to expedite an outright ban on asbestos and ensure that the necessary measures are taken to safeguard the health of all Malaysians.
- Above all, the MTUC and its affiliates call on the Government of Malaysia to ratify the ILO Convention 162 and 139.

SAVE OUR FUTURE GENERATIONS
All countries have a responsibility to their populations and the international community to take urgent remedial action to totally ban asbestos or it will prove to be a health 'time bomb' particularly in our part of the world affecting generations to come.

ACT NOW
End of Presentation