Asbestos in India
Abandoned or Neglected
Myths & Realities

BY

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Background

- India – the largest importer of asbestos
- More than 300,000 workers, working directly or indirectly
- Thousands of construction workers use asbestos products with almost no protection and no warnings
- More than 50,000 workers in Alang Ship Breaking Yard, Gujarat involved in ship breaking activities without even the knowledge of lethal effects of this product
- 77 large manufacturing units in India given clearance by Ministry of Environment and Forests. No data available for small and medium scale enterprises
Imports / Exports

- In the amended Foreign Trade Policy 2009-14, no restrictions on asbestos export. No restriction on import of chrysotile asbestos. Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 prohibits the imports of waste asbestos (dust and fibre),

- Imports of asbestos were 460,449 tonnes in 2012-13 against 378,122 tonnes in the previous year. The imports comprised chrysotile asbestos 458,571 tonnes and asbestos (others) 1,309 tonnes. Imports of asbestos were mainly from Russia (58%), Kazakhstan (23%), Brazil (13%) and China (4%). (Source IBM Asbestos Yearbook 2013)

- India – exporter of Asbestos fibres (1296 tonnes 2011-12, 78 tonnes in 2012-13). Mainly exported to Nepal. Exports to Italy in 2011-12

- Exports of asbestos-cement products were 56,406 tonnes in 2012-13 as compared to 41,304 tonnes in the preceding year. Exports mainly to UAE (31%), Saudi Arabia (18%), Nepal (17%), and Qatar (9%)
Mining of Asbestos

- June 1986 a ban on expansion of area of existing Asbestos mines was placed in the country. The letter stated - “Asbestos mining has deleterious effects on the health of the workers and exposes them to diseases like Silicosis and Pneumoconiosis etc, no expansion in the mining of Asbestos should henceforth be permitted”.

- March 1989 the ban was further extended to mining of those minerals as well where Asbestos as contamination was found in substantial quantities.

- Since June 1993 all mining of Asbestos has been banned. Leases of all operational mines expired by 2005.

- 3 mines in Andhra Pradesh continue operations and report production. No Action by government authorities. No health and Safety information available.
Asbestos in Indian Parliament

- Issue of ban on use and mining raised 84 times in Indian Parliament since 2000
- On 21-2-14, Lok Sabha, accepts 21 cases of Asbestosis were reported in 2010 from Gujarat and 2 cases were reported from Maharashtra in 2012.
- Exposure limit for the fibre has been reduced to 0.1 f/cc (December 2014)
- MoEF the nodal Ministry for giving environmental clearances to factories manufacturing asbestos products. No Asbestos Industry project has so far been denied Environmental Clearance
- The White Asbestos (Ban on use and Import) 2014 bill was re-introduced in Rajya Sabha in 2014. The bill seeks to “provide for a total ban on use and import of white asbestos in the country and to promote the use of safer and cheaper alternative to white asbestos and for matters connected therewith and incidental thereto
NIOH Study

- A study titled “Study of Health Hazards / Environment Hazards resulting from use of Chrysotile Variety of Asbestos in the country” entrusted in 2004 to assess environmental and health hazards at a cost of INR 6 Million (1.6 Million contributed by industry).

- Aim – to ascertain India’s position on Chrysotile asbestos at the Rotterdam Convention

- Result - No significant health and environmental hazards.

- Study has been criticized by Independent Scientists and organizations for its flawed methodology

- No retired workers were selected for the study; Workers who had worked only for 5 years were chosen for the study. In one factory, the mean age of workers was 27.4 ± 6.5 (range 18-45 years). 71% were up to 30 years of age. Mean job duration was 4.5 ± 3.2 years. Minimum experience was 1 year and majority had experience of work up to 5 years.

- The study used again at COP 7, May 2015 to oppose listing of Chrysotile Asbestos
Problems and Challenges

- Most of workers unorganized, contractual, migrant.
- Labour Laws tedious and it takes number of years to prove the facts and compensation claims also take years to clear.
- In various departments at Govt. of India level, the data collection and compilation is the biggest challenge.
- Victims mis-diagnosed for lack of expertise and inability of physicians to co-relate with occupational history.
- Government Doctors don’t accept certifications and diagnosis from independent and renowned doctors.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Myths</th>
<th>Realities</th>
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<tr>
<td>There are no Asbestos Victims</td>
<td>More than 450 victims compensated by T&amp;N Trust so far. Several govt agencies have diagnosed cases. Cases of environmental exposure found. Mesothelioma cases diagnosed by Tata Memorial Hospital and Gujarat Cancer hospital. More cases cannot be ruled out</td>
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<td>Industry follows all regulations</td>
<td>regulations are not followed and implementation is lax.</td>
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<td>Asbestos can be safely used</td>
<td>Asbestos can not be safely used. Even Developed countries have found it impossible to use safely</td>
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<td>Need to use it as it is a product for the poor and cheap</td>
<td>No studies undertaken for substitutes, no steps to reduce cost of suitable substitutes. If health warnings are adequately publicised, people will make an informed decision</td>
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<tr>
<td>Studies have found it to be safe</td>
<td>Studies are flawed and selection of subjects is suspect. Industry influence in the studies is evident</td>
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Empty Asbestos Fibre bag. Legally to be shredded in Automatic Bag Opening Device
An open Fibre bag
Photos from stone crushing factory. Samples have tested positive for asbestos.
In-Famous Roro Hills. Mountain of white asbestos
Successes

✓ National Green Tribunal has ordered closure of all Asbestos mines in the country in scientific way.
✓ Case for compensation of Environmental victims in and around Roro Mines
✓ The Turner and Newall Trust Fund compensated 450 victims so far.
✓ Thermal Power Plant, Ahmedabad 14 cases of asbestos were settled by compensation.
✓ Three cases of asbestos victims from Gujarat Composite Cement Ltd. are compensated from ESIC.
✓ In Rajasthan 18 workers of asbestos victims have been approved the compensation.
✓ National Program on identification, elimination and control of asbestos in India in 12th FY Plan (2012-17)
Successes (contd.)

✓ Several Medical camps held - Primary, secondary and environmental exposure cases found. Compensation claims filed

✓ In Orissa, the issue of govt. inaction created a lot of hue and cry and the plant’s operation had to be stopped. The clearance was cancelled.

✓ In Bihar, the CM assured to look into the grievances of villagers. Clearances for asbestos plants have been cancelled

✓ National Trade Unions recognize hazards of asbestos and many affiliated unions of BWI and Industries demand a ban on asbestos.

✓ Kerala human Rights Commission ordered to avoid asbestos roofing in the school building in future and existing roofing of asbestos be removed
THANK YOU

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