



OCCUPATIONAL & ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH NETWORK OF INDIA

Press Statement

Ban use of Asbestos Products in India

Delhi, India: February 13, 2012 (For Immediate Release)

Occupational and Environmental Health Network of India (OEHNI) today urged the Hon'ble Prime Minister to urgently ban use of Asbestos products in India. The letter follows an online petition launched seeking opinions from across the world. The petition has been signed by hundreds of individuals from across the globe.

Mohit Gupta, Coordinator of OEHNI, said:

“No attempts have been made by the Government to identify and locate probable victims of Asbestos related disorders and there are no official statistics available. In India, a silent Bhopal disaster is happening every year.”

OEHNI calls upon the Indian Government to implement a comprehensive and total ban on the use of all asbestos fiber and asbestos-containing products throughout India within the next three years. During the phase-out period, we call on the authorities to:

- Identify and list all asbestos product manufacturing and allied industries across the country. (including those in the organised and unorganised sector)
- Quantify the import, export and use of asbestos in these industries
- Instruct the Ministry of Commerce to move asbestos import/export from OGL to restricted list
- Make an assessment of implementation of the 1995 Supreme Court order and take stringent action against all companies found to be guilty of non-implementation of the order.
- Constitute a multi-disciplinary committee to draw up an action plan for phasing out asbestos production and use in the country.
- Issue orders that state authorities must identify the number of workers (both unorganised and organised) engaged in asbestos handling, mining, manufacture and use.
- Work out mechanisms with the state governments for long term medical surveillance and health care of asbestos workers and their families
- Given the long term health impact of asbestos, create special government insurance and compensation schemes for at-risk workers, those who handled asbestos (the majority of these workers are in the unorganised sector and are not covered under ESI).
- Create a special compensation fund with contributions from the asbestos industry for long term medical care of asbestos victims. The creation of such a fund should not be misconstrued to legitimise the continuation of the asbestos industry, but should be seen as an affirmative action to take care of the long term medical care and economic rehabilitation of asbestos victims and their families.
- Undertake a thorough technical inspection of all asbestos mines, draw up a technically-validated closure plan and form monitoring committees, which include members of local communities, to oversee the closures

- Conduct environmental and health monitoring in areas surrounding derelict and active asbestos mines.
- Take legal action against mining companies which are found to be in violation of improper closure of old/abandoned mines or are still operating illegal mines
- Constitute a multi-disciplinary committee with representatives from government departments to assess reports commissioned from independent, technical and socio-economic experts on the operations of existing and abandoned asbestos mines which consider not only the technical aspects of mine closures and environmental management but also look into the medical, social and economic rehabilitation of labour.
- Constitute an inter-departmental committee to phase out asbestos manufacture and use in India; recommend safer alternatives; work with some of the CSIR institutions which are already working on developing alternatives to asbestos fibres which are easily and cost effectively available in India. If necessary give subsidies/incentives (in a time bound manner) to encourage the use of safer alternatives and create disincentives for continued use of asbestos.
- Set a three year time-frame for the complete phase out of all manufacture and use of asbestos.
- Recommend Ministry of Environment and Forests not to give environmental clearances to asbestos manufacturing units or their expansions.

A copy of the letter can be viewed at - <http://www.oehni.in/node/78>

Notes to editors:

1. The Occupational and Environmental Network of India (OEHNI) was formally proposed at World Social Forum in 2004 and was formed following the National Consultation meeting in 2006. OEHNI is a unique solidarity group, which works towards making Indian workplaces safe. OEHNI combines the OSH rights struggle in different regions of India into a single united struggle and demands better health and safety for the workers across the nation. Mohit Gupta (Coordinator) can be contacted via email – oehni.del@gmail.com.