

# LETTERS

EDITOR: ROY COOK, 429-5220; FAX 498-5677

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## Quebec's chrysotile industry defends asbestos mining, export

We read with interest "Canada's double standard on asbestos: Government says known carcinogen is too risky for use in Canada, but that doesn't prevent it from pushing chrysotile sales abroad" (Ideas, April 26).

We note that the authors are not well informed about the asbestos dossier. Nowhere do they distinguish between the different types of asbestos — chrysotile and the amphiboles, which have very different biological impacts. It is like comparing a bicycle to a car, two means of transportation.

The removal of asbestos from certain buildings has nothing to do with the fact that it is a carcinogen. If this was the case, it would also be necessary to remove concrete (which contains silica, a carcinogen as well).

When a material is degraded, damaged

or has reached the end of its useful life, it must be removed. Chrysotile (the only mineral fibre of the asbestos family mined in Canada and this for over 125 years) is a substance which can be safely used in non-friable (safe) products such as fibre cements, asphalts, friction products, and others.

One of the roles of the Chrysotile Institute is to assist in the spread of the latest scientific knowledge throughout the world. The recent discoveries about the low biopersistence of Canadian, Brazilian and American chrysotiles are encouraging and merit publication.

The lower the biopersistence of a substance, the lower the risk of toxic effects on health. The low biopersistence of chrysotile compared with the amphiboles (crocidolite, amosite, etc.) has been known for some time and is generally ac-

cepted in scientific circles.

What is new and interesting to understand and to publish is the significantly higher biopersistence of certain substitute fibres for chrysotile, such as cellulose, refractory ceramic fibre and aramid fibres (Kevlar). Are the article's authors prepared to guarantee the innocuity of substitute fibres to the public?

We would have liked to count on the support of Canadian scientists to validate the research results carried on outside of Canada. The fact that foreign scientists conducted the research is an important element to avoid what the authors called a biased attitude.

Have the authors visited the clients in developing countries? We think not, because clients of Canadian chrysotile are technologically advanced and well versed in the control of dust emissions in

their process, most of which (90 per cent) are wet processes for chrysocement production. We are shocked by the authors' condescending attitude about people of emerging countries.

That France decided to maintain the ban on chrysotile (for commercial protectionism or other reasons) is their business. It is not the Canadian approach.

In our opinion Canada does not have to make excuses for exploiting, using or exporting its resources, whether it be petroleum, nickel, uranium or chrysotile. The fact that chrysotile is mined only in Quebec now (there are other deposits in other Canadian provinces which could be safely mined) does not justify the banning of chrysotile in Canada.

*Raynald Pare, president,  
Mouvement ProChrysotile Quebecois,  
Thetford Mines, Que.*

### Export it all, please

Re: "Canada's double standard on asbestos: Government says known carcinogen is too risky for use in Canada, but that doesn't prevent it from pushing chrysotile sales abroad," Ideas, April 26.

University of Alberta Prof. Colin L. Soskolne has taken a noble position on chrysotile asbestos.

You may want to ask him about amosite and crocidolite asbestos.

The irony is that the U of A is full of it — including the (privately owned) Faculty Club.

So are our schools, workplaces and many homes.

Let Quebec export it all.

*M.R.C. Gibson,  
Edmonton*