



MONTREAL GAZETTE, POSTMEDIA NETWORK, FILE  
A small lake rests at the bottom of the 2.5-kilometre-wide asbestos mining pit in the town of Asbestos, Que., in April. The federal government gave a quarter of a million dollars to an asbestos industry lobby group earlier this year.

## Tax support of asbestos industry means we all share the blame

PM continues to boost market for deadly product overseas

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The Quebec town of Asbestos is seeking a provincial subsidy to export vast amounts of deadly asbestos to the developing world for the next quarter century.

After the Canadian Cancer Society expressed opposition to this project, the town retaliated by cancelling its Relay for Life fundraiser for the society.

A recent opinion article in the *Journal* condemns the "absence of a collective conscience," noting that "the stench of immorality clings to everyone who participates in the asbestos industry."

But it is not only the town of Asbestos that has this stench. The Canadian government is as fervent a promoter of the asbestos trade as are the citizens of Asbestos. The leaders of the Liberal party, the NDP and the Green party all oppose export of asbestos.

But Prime Minister Stephen Harper, rejecting appeals from the Canadian Cancer Society, continues to support the asbestos industry.

In the battle between the Canadian Cancer Society and the asbestos industry, Harper, just like the town of Asbestos, stands firmly behind the asbestos industry.

In March this year, the Canadian Cancer Society again appealed to the Canadian government not to give yet another quarter of a million dollars to the asbestos industry lobby group, the Asbestos Institute (also called Chrysotile Institute).

But the tax dollars were handed over, and with this money, the Chrysotile Institute puts out glossy brochures, bearing the official em-

blem of Canada with the Canadian flag, telling people in developing countries that chrysotile asbestos is a wonderful product they can safely use.

This is false and deceptive information. Chrysotile asbestos represents 100 per cent of the world's asbestos trade and 95 per cent of all asbestos ever sold. The scientific evidence is indisputable that chrysotile asbestos causes mesothelioma and other deadly cancers, as well as asbestosis.

Harper and the asbestos industry defend their position by saying asbestos can be safely used overseas. They maintain that exposure to a high level of asbestos fibres (one fibre per cubic centimetre of air) is perfectly safe. This so-called "safe" level is 10 times higher than that allowed by any Canadian province, except Quebec, and 100 times higher than in a number of European countries.

Not a single recognized medical or public health authority agrees with the federal/industry assessment.

Independent scientists have documented that breathing this high level of asbestos fibres will cause many entirely preventable and painful deaths.

In addition, because few protections exist in developing countries, workers are exposed to even higher levels of asbestos fibres. The recent CBC documentary *Canada's Ugly Secret* showed workers bathed in clouds of Quebec's asbestos.

Last week, Quebec's National Director of Public Health, Dr. Alain Poirier, publicly warned of the risks involved in asbestos use, pointedly noting that the Quebec government's own Public Health Institute does not

support the position that "safe use" of chrysotile asbestos is possible.

The Canadian Medical Association, the Canadian Public Health Association, the Canadian Cancer Society, the World Health Organization, and the 9,500 doctors in Quebec have all said it is medically indefensible to export asbestos.

The 250 miners currently working in Asbestos have an average age of 57 years. The younger generation shows little enthusiasm to work in an asbestos mine. The union leader called the wage the workers will be paid, if the new Asbestos initiative goes ahead, a starvation wage.

There is another option, one that would respect workers in Asbestos and workers overseas. It would demonstrate intelligent leadership if, instead of investing in a dying industry that exports a deadly product, government funds were invested in new, healthy economic enterprises to provide Asbestos a positive future.

Instead, Harper supports the asbestos industry and allows the Canada flag to be used to help sell asbestos. This is a desecration of the flag.

Along with the residents of Asbestos, all Canadian citizens are accountable. In our name, with our tax dollars, and with our flag, our federal government is aiding and abetting this lethal trade.

It is up to us to demand that this wrongdoing stop.

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