News Release

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Canadian unions renew call for comprehensive ban on asbestos

OTTAWA – Canadian unions are renewing their call for a comprehensive ban on asbestos, announcing today they will highlight the issue at events across the country on April 28, the National Day of Mourning for workers killed, injured or made ill on the job.

“Asbestos is the leading cause of work-related death in Canada, and with imports on the rise, the danger is increasing,” CLC president Hassan Yussuff said at a news conference in Ottawa today.

“That’s why we are calling on the federal government to commit to a comprehensive ban on all kinds of asbestos and to outline its plans for doing so before Parliament rises for its summer recess,” he added.

Yussuff worked as a mechanic for 22 years, and through that time was exposed to asbestos contained in brake pads. The brake pads he worked with then are much like those still being imported into Canada today, despite the availability of Canadian-made asbestos-free alternatives.

Michelle Côté, whose father Clem Côté, a boilermaker by trade, is very ill with mesothelioma, made a passionate and personal plea to Prime Minister Trudeau at the news conference.

“My dad knows we can’t help the men and women who have already been exposed. This plea to ban asbestos is something he and we can do to help stop future generations from having to face the same death sentence. I hope the Prime Minister is listening,” said Michelle Côté.

“What successive federal governments haven’t seemed to fully appreciate is that it isn’t just the workers themselves, but their families and indeed all Canadians who are increasingly at risk,” said Fred Clare, an insulator by trade and Vice-President (Eastern Canada) of the International Association of Heat and Frost Insulators and Allied Workers. “I hope we finally see some change now.”
The plan outlined by the CLC includes:

- legislation banning the use, import and export of asbestos;
- the creation of an expert panel to advise Parliament on implementation;
- national registries of both contaminated buildings and cases of asbestos related diseases;
- a comprehensive health response to asbestos diseases;
- banning the use of asbestos-containing materials in federally-funded infrastructure projects;
- harmonizing regulatory standards for asbestos disposal;
- making sure Canada’s Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS 2015) requires all asbestos-containing products are accompanied by life-saving material Safety Data Sheets that warn workers of the presence of asbestos;
- advocating for the addition of chrysotile asbestos to the Prior Informed Consent (PIC) list of hazardous materials under the Rotterdam Convention; and
- providing transitional support for businesses, workers and communities affected by the ban on the use, import and export of asbestos and asbestos-containing products.

More than 2,000 Canadians die every year from diseases caused by asbestos exposure, like mesothelioma and lung cancer. Death from mesothelioma increased 60 percent between 2000 and 2012. Internationally, the World Health Organization reports more than 100,000 asbestos-related deaths per year.

Asbestos imports to Canada grew from $4.7 million in 2011 to $8.2 million in 2015.

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