

Global Labor Rejects Asbestos

Groups representing global labor support the campaign to ban asbestos and many affiliated unions in the Asia-Pacific region are making a global asbestos ban a focus of their activities. The Japan Trade Union Congress, Korean trade unions and the Australian Congress of Trade Unions have achieved good results working with national policy makers on asbestos bans and health and safety legislation. Labor groups in other countries in the region have not, up till now, had the same success but nevertheless the ban asbestos policy remains a cornerstone of labor action in Asia following the October 2005 Resolution to Ban Asbestos which was adopted at the 81st International Confederation of Free Trade Unions-Asia & Pacific Executive Board Meeting in Malaysia and the 18th Regional Conference in February 2005 in Nepal.

Throughout 2005-2006, work on asbestos continued apace with the publication of trade union ban asbestos campaign material, training and capacity development of key personnel and the implementation of joint projects in Bangladesh, Pakistan, Indonesia and the Philippines. On International Workers' Memorial Day (IWMD, April 28, 2006), trade unions around the world highlighted the human cost of asbestos use and demanded a worldwide ban during demonstrations, rallies, information sessions and marches to mark the day. As the theme for labor activities on IWMD 2007 was occupational cancer, the asbestos scourge was, once again, a high priority issue on that day of global action. A document entitled: *Occupational Cancer/Zero Cancer: A Union Guide To Prevention*, produced in English, French, Spanish and Russian by the International Metalworkers' Federation in collaboration with the 10 sector-based global union federations and the International Trade Union Confederation, was launched on that day.⁹¹ Placing asbestos within the context of other occupational cancers it stated:

"at least one in every 10 cancers – and probably many more – is the result of preventable, predictable workplace exposures. Asbestos is the biggest industrial killer of all time, and kills thousands from cancer every single week, at least one death every five minutes. But it is not banned worldwide...

Unions are challenging workplace cancer risks. Asbestos bans are spreading, despite a cash-rich rearguard public relations offensive by the asbestos industry. Unions have won recognition of causes of occupational

cancer, restrictions on their use and compensation for their victims. Prevention, though, is the only cure. That's why, through advice, training and union action at workplace, national and international levels, this campaign intends to ensure workplace ill-health is not the forgotten item on the cost-benefit ledger. Work should provide a living, not a cause of death."



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International Metalworkers' Federation

