

# Plenary Presentation

## 6.2 NORDIC EXPERIENCES AFTER EARLY ASBESTOS BANS

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(Below are edited notes from the PowerPoint presentation used at the Congress.)

### Movement towards the Nordic ban

- Scientists have known of the dangers of asbestos exposure for decades.
- 1952: Insulation workers press for autopsies on dead colleagues. Regular examinations for insulators established.
- 1954: Asbestosis recognised.
- 1950s: Asbestos and mineral wool often discussed in Nordic trade union conferences.
- 1972: A ban on the use of asbestos in insulation materials came after threats of a boycott from the insulators' union.
- Some enterprises found to be concealing the use of "banned" asbestos technology.
- 1986: Danish Supreme Court convicts the manufacturer "Eternit" as responsible for reported diseases stating that, even if there was not a total ban, they should have been aware of dangers for 50 years and thus should have taken action to prevent disease.
- Late 80s: Ban of asbestos in the Nordic countries and Germany.
- Many difficulties (technical) remain including disputes about final dates for banning different products.

### Post-ban developments

- Following dispensations for continued asbestos use, carpenters at a state construction site took action. Their strike was successful: the use of asbestos-containing material was suspended.



- Nordic Council of Ministers produces a technical report on alternative (to asbestos) materials. The results of testing some alternative materials are shown in table 1.

**Table 1. Tests on alternatives materials**

	<b>IARC</b>	<b>Technical</b>
<b>Wollastonite</b>	no cancer	breaks (trial)
<b>MMVF</b>	2 B	breaks
<b>Cellulose</b>	not eval.	no problem
<b>PVA</b>	no cancer	no problem
<b>RCF</b>	2A	extreme heat
<b>Flax</b>	not eval.	testing now
<b>Other plants</b>	?	?

- After the ban: State Construction Research Institute publishes book with good pictures of asbestos materials used in buildings.
- Attention is drawn to the importance of easy identification of such materials (product names, uses, photos, database etc.).
- Cancer researchers made a map of Denmark with spots of increased incidence of mesothelioma. Clearly highlighted on the map (by increased incidences) are areas containing: shipyards, asbestos-cement manufacturing, car-brake manufacturing, glass manufacturing.

**Current problems**

- The legacy of widespread asbestos use: in the mid 1970s there were more than **3000** product types containing asbestos.
- While asbestosis is decreasing steadily since the ban, there is still a considerable number of lung cancer and mesothelioma cases.
- We can postulate historic phases of production and diseases (Table 2). These phases apply to a range of activities: mining, manufacturing, use, maintenance and demolition.

**Table 2. Asbestos Industry Phases and resultant Diseases**

<b>Phase</b>	<b>Diseases</b>
<b>First phase:</b> High dust levels in manufacturing	Recognition of asbestosis
<b>Second phase:</b> Dust/fibre levels are reduced in manufacturing	Recognition of primary lung cancer
<b>Third phase:</b> Low levels in manufacturing.	Discovery of various cancers: Gastro-intestinal, throat, nose, etc. Importantly: mesothelioma
<b>Fourth Phase ?:</b> “Controlled use”, very low levels (as indoor-climate)	Mesothelioma, lung cancer. Recognition of prolonged latency periods.

- Gaining just compensation is still a hard struggle: delays, no hospital reports, settlements based on exposure history not disease prognosis, if a smoker, no separation of compensation.
- It is estimated that delays within the system can result in losses of up to 75% for claimants. Typically, a settlement of \$25000 instead of \$100.000.
- Technical difficulties resulting from the use of alternative materials.
- There are compulsory 4-day training courses in asbestos removal, but no authorisation of the enterprises carrying out such work. The formal reason is that Denmark has still not ratified ILO Convention 162.
- New generations are asking what is asbestos and why is it dangerous?
- A great deal of work concerns the refurbishment of buildings. Both clients and employers are tempted to class asbestos as a “no-problem” detail so as to avoid training courses and proper work conditions.
- Registration of employees working with asbestos - no effect after 10 years.
- Dealing with other legislation – for example, permission to use asbestos in the filtration of juices.
- There are Implications for different kinds of technical documents: the word “asbestos” appears in 182 legislative documents.
- Implications for standardization. e.g., EU/CEN: "Fibre-cement" with A-deviations; ISO: Asbestos-cement.

### **The future, Nordic**

- More cancer and mesothelioma.
- Many products will be encapsulated, but not removed – a problem for our children
- “Alternatives for the alternatives.”
- High level of information - practical guidelines.

### **The future, EU**

- Even with out-phasing, problems remain with asbestos removal and existing asbestos.
- A revision of asbestos-directive 91/382/EEC is going on right now.

### **Requirements:**

- A system of **registering** asbestos in buildings, constructions and materials.
- **Compulsory training courses** for those working in environments known to be contaminated with asbestos.
- Practical guidelines for employees, tenants and others.
- **Approval** from a competent authority for all enterprises engaged in work where contact with asbestos is possible.
- Lowering the **TLV** to 0.1 fibre/cm<sup>3</sup> like the USA.
- A system to ensure proper handling of asbestos-containing **waste**.
- Updating the **list of approved** asbestos-caused illnesses and full compensation.
- Establishing a publicly accessible **database** containing measurements of asbestos fibre levels in different working conditions.
- Provision of a coherent system for **registration of exposure** to asbestos.
- Minimum and **strict requirements for safe work procedures**.

## **A global future without asbestos**

Requirements:

- Export of technologies, training courses etc, minimum work procedures.
- Ratification of ILO 162.
- Watch out for Russian asbestos!
- Technical and political support for bans.
- Pressure on WHO (including concern about asbestos in drinking water systems).
- International trade union campaign.