

Summary of Asbestos Litigation in Japan

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Abstract

In 1970s and 80s workers who suffered asbestosis after years of manufacturing asbestos products or spraying asbestos in construction sites filed damage suits against the asbestos product manufacturers or related companies. Among them was the Heiwa Sekimen case, a lawsuit filed by a group of plaintiffs against Heiwa Sekimen Co. Ltd. and several individual cases brought against Nihon Asubesuto (Asbestos). All of these cases were settled by conciliation.

The Yokosuka Sumitomo (Heavy Industries Ltd.) asbestosis lawsuit was filed in 1988. This was the first action by shipyard workers in Japan. Through the legal fight, they sought to question the responsibility of the shipbuilding company, their employer, for the health hazards caused by the use of asbestos material in the shipyard in Yokosuka. The initiative was followed by a series of legal actions. The bereaved family of a dead thermal power plant worker filed a suit against the Shikoku Electric Power Co. Inc. Thereafter workers who had worked in the U.S. Naval Base in Yokosuka and bereaved families collectively sued the Japanese Government as an employer, and in Nagasaki workers and bereaved families mounted legal challenges against Mitsubishi Heavy Industries Ltd.

Recently, some lawsuits were filed in the shipbuilding field again, and a case about asbestos removal in a nursery school was brought into court. Such various types of asbestos litigation are increasing nationally, not to say rapidly.