

Overseas Presence of Japanese Asbestos-Related Enterprises

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Abstract

For developing countries, asbestos is a 'precious' material for building construction and product manufacturing. Therefore, those countries may repeat almost the same experiences as advanced countries, and suffer severe damage induced by asbestos contamination. Unfortunately, not a few problems including Minamata disease and arsenic pollution have happened in developing countries. Although some people say that the quality of environmental protection increases as stages of economic growth advance, asbestos use in developing countries must be strictly regulated at an earlier stage.

In fact, world trade statistics show that asbestos imports have been increasing in Thailand, India, and China, whereas those of Japan and Korea have been rapidly decreasing. In addition, importation of asbestos into Vietnam is also gradually rising. In accordance with such trends in asbestos imports, exports of asbestos cement production of Thailand, China, and Malaysia have been rapidly increasing. Taking those tendencies into account, people could suppose that the Asian region has been constructing an economic structure in which the region imports asbestos, and then exports it again in the form of various products after manufacturing. In such a process, we have to inquire whether protection measures for occupational and residential environments have been appropriately installed.

Some Japanese companies have transferred their production activities to Asian countries. As to the reasons why they go to such countries, the following two points should be noted. Like many industries, one is to expand their business into new markets. It is very easy to reduce production costs in this region because labor is cheaper than in Japan. Another reason comes from the situation that production activities in Asian countries are easier than in Japan, because environmental regulations in those countries are less strict than in Japan. Accessible documents indicate that the number of facilities which Japanese companies invest in and/or operate is increasing.

In view of the above-mentioned situations, we have to monitor the trend of asbestos use and related production activities as well as environmental protection in Asian countries.