

Canada to stop opposing asbestos hazard listing

September 15 2012



A piece of extracted serpentine, which contains Chrysotile Asbestos fibers, is seen in 2011. Canada dropped its longtime opposition to global restrictions on asbestos, dealing a blow to the country's dying mining industry of the fire-resistant substance.

Canada dropped Friday its longtime opposition to global restrictions on asbestos, dealing a blow to the country's dying mining industry of the fire-resistant substance.

Canada has long led efforts against listing chrysotile asbestos as a [hazardous material](#) under the United Nations Rotterdam Convention, which requires exporters to warn importing countries of any dangers and allows them to ban its import.

The listing, however, would not on its own ban the sale of asbestos.

Canada is the only G8 country opposed to the listing. Last year, it joined Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Ukraine and Vietnam in objecting to such a move.

Industry Minister Christian Paradis said the policy change followed plans by Quebec's provincial premier-elect, Pauline Marois, to end production of the substance in Canada's only province producing the fireproofing and insulating [fibers](#).

Marois cancelled Can\$58 million (\$60 million) in [loan guarantees](#) offered by her predecessor to restart Jeffrey Mine in the province.

"As a direct consequence of her decision, Canada will no longer oppose the listing of chrysotile asbestos as a dangerous substance under the Rotterdam Convention," Paradis said.

The Jeffrey Mine and the nearby Thetford Mine were Canada's last two operating asbestos mines. Their recent closures marked the first time in 130 years that Canada, which once dominated world production, had suspended production of the mineral.

According to the last figures available, Canada exported 750,000 tonnes of asbestos in 2006. India, Indonesia and the Philippines, among others, have been major importers of Canadian asbestos.

The fibrous crystal mineral is primarily used as building insulation because of its sound absorption and resistance to fire, heat and electrical damage, but exposure to it can cause [lung inflammation](#) and cancer.

Critics say [asbestos exposure](#) claims more than 107,000 lives around the world each year.

Last year, Paradis pointed to scientific reviews that found asbestos can be used under controlled conditions, but the opposition said the government was ignoring advice from its own scientists to stop mining and exporting it.

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