

## Asbestos poisoning victims want Yale honor revoked

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(AP)—Victims of asbestos poisoning in Italy are urging Yale University to rescind an honorary degree given to a Swiss man later convicted of negligence in some 2,000 asbestos-related deaths.

Stephan Schmidheiny, former owner of Swiss construction company Eternit, was convicted in 2012 by an Italian court and sentenced to 16 years for his role in the contamination of sites in northern Italy. An appeals court upheld the conviction for negligence in thousands of asbestos-related deaths blamed on contamination from the company and increased his sentence to 18 years.

Another appeal is pending and Schmidheiny is not in custody. He has denied wrongdoing.

Yale awarded Schmidheiny an honorary degree in 1996, citing him as "one of the world's most environmentally conscious business leaders," and praised his efforts to create sustainable development, the New Haven Register reported.

Lawyer Christopher Meisenkothen, who represents the Asbestos Victims and Relatives Association, said what happened in Italy is the exact opposite of what Yale cited.

"It flies in the face of actual history. This is a matter of honor for the Italian victims," Meisenkothen said.

Yale said a decision to revoke an honorary degree must be by the Yale Corporation, the university's governing body.

"The decision to award the degree was made by a committee that considered his full record as a philanthropist who used his wealth to fund sustainable development in Latin America and elsewhere, and a path-breaking international advocate of change in the way businesses address environmental sustainability, as well as a businessman who inherited and dismantled a decades-old family [asbestos](#) processing concern," the statement from Yale said.

Yale should at least appoint a faculty committee to review the matter and make a recommendation, Meisenkothen said.

"A lot of this information was not available to Yale at the time they awarded the degree," Meisenkothen said. "Yale is not our adversary. We just want to give them information they didn't have before, so they can do the right thing."

Some alumni and faculty, including 1992 graduate Christopher Sellers, have also urged Yale to revoke the honor.

"It shames me as a Yale graduate to think Yale isn't willing to look at what it did here," said Sellers, now a history professor at Stony Brook University. "For me, it's pretty clear that if Yale had known in 1996 everything we know today, it wouldn't have honored Schmidheiny with this degree."

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