

**International Conference on Chrysotile
May 23-24 2006, Montreal, Canada**

**Government-Industry Agreement:
*AGREEMENT of actions COFEPRIS-Mexican Institute of Fibro Industries (IMFI)
for safe process control and use of asbestos)***

INTRODUCTION

Asbestos is a fibrous mineral with thermal resistance, there are two groups of asbestos: serpentine and amphibole, only one type of asbestos is derived from serpentine minerals: chrysotile. The amphibole group includes five species of asbestos such as amosite, crocidolite, tremolite, anthrophyllite and actinolite, from them two are the most commercially valuable forms: amosite or brown asbestos and crocidolite or blue asbestos¹. More than 30 million tons of asbestos in various forms have been mined in the past century, and is present in more than 3,000 manufactures products. The causal association of all types of asbestos with asbestosis (progressive fibrotic disease of the lungs), lung cancer and mesothelioma is well documented all around the world. The continuing use of asbestos in different countries suggest a large number of workers exposed as well as general population^{1,2}.

Historical perspective

The development of asbestos-using industries in Mexico began in 1930s, when an asbestos cement company opened a facility in Mexico City. After that there were an increase in the number of companies settled along the Country including several states such as State of Mexico, Nuevo Leon, Sonora, Chihuahua, Jalisco, Hidalgo and Tabasco, mostly of the companies were transferred from EUA and European countries as a result of asbestos' banned in developed countries^{2,3}.

Policies and regulations for the protection against health risks

The Federal Commission for Sanitary Risk Protection (COFEPRIS) is a decentralized agency for the Ministry of Health, with autonomy regarding technical administrative and operation activities; additionally COFEPRIS is the competent authority for regulation, control and encouragement to protect public health. Their areas of responsibility are among production, commercialization, imports and exports, as well as publicity of medicine and health technology, consumer products, toxics and dangerous substances, and also in environmental risks, occupational health and basic sanitation. Coordination agreements are conducted trough the Federal Sanitary System which makes the linkage between federal level with regulation and policies and state level where the operative activities are conducted including inspection, control and encouragement.

The protection against health risks is observed using regulatory and non regulatory policies, the first ones included regulation actions, Mexican Official Standards (MOS); and the second ones included agreements of actions.

Production and use

There are no geological sources of asbestos in Mexico; therefore we import the product from Canada and Brazil through official authorization, which is given by COFEPRIS. According to the official records the only type of asbestos that has been imported in the country is chrysotile because the evidence provided by epidemiological and toxicological studies where its lower risk has been demonstrated.

Regarding uses and processes of asbestos, there is an agreement between COFEPRIS and the Instituto Mexicano de Fibro Industrias (IMFI) which was established in order to have sanitary control for safety process, and use of asbestos.

GOVERNMENT-INDUSTRY AGREEMENT

There is an agreement with the asbestos industry (IMFI, Mexican Institute of Fiber-Industry) since 2004 which has included all the industry users of chrysotile to established agreements and obligations according to the current legislation, in addition this instrument is able to provide capacity building regarding safety processes and safety use of chrysotile. During the period of 1998 to 2003 26 industries has been imported chrysotile fibers 68 times, with approximately 46,000 of tons during the whole period.

Main uses of asbestos in the country included brakes production, parts for industrial boilers, auto parts, pipes and water containers, asbestos ceilings and also in the production of cement for construction industry.

The agreement is basically a self regulation scheme, that was signed on September 10, 2004 in Mexico City, and is applicable for 2 years, however could be extended based on a results review process and do not limit the regulatory authority of COFEPRIS.

In the agreement several activities were included, such as

- a) Preparation of good practices guideline (GMP) for safe processing and use of chrysotile asbestos and verification list
- b) Personnel training of COFEPRIS & IMFI, in order to have complete information regarding the guideline and the checklist used during verification process
- c) Assessment of compliance of mandatory and voluntary issues
- d) Follow up of monitoring reports including the work environment and workers health

In the case of no compliance in the agreement for any of the companies members of the IMFI, such company is temporally excluded of the agreement and will be able to reincorporate once it solve the problem.

Laws and regulations related with occupational hazardous substances

The Federal Labor Law mandates security and hygienic specifications for any hazardous substance, in the law asbestosis has been classified as an occupational illness. In addition

the law establishes the application of labor regulations in the mining industries, metallurgy, iron & auto parts

In order to protect general population and workers health, Mexico accounts with several regulatory instruments such as the General Law of Health which considers the control of activities, facilities, products and services for risks protection, also there is a section for the safety & hygiene at the work environment. The law also includes regulation regarding registration, imports and export permits for pesticides, plant nutrients and toxic and dangerous substances and dangerous materials.

Other instruments used to health protection include National Mexican Standards (NOMs) to protect the health for asbestos exposure there is the NOM-125-SSA1-1994.

That NOM establishes requirements for the safety process and use of asbestos (National Cassette Oct 8th, 1996), including mandatory specifications to protect the health of people who is occupational exposed to the risk factor and the surrounding environments. The NOM-125-SSA1-1994 is mandatory in all facilities that process asbestos fiber.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Because of the previous exposure to asbestos fibers with high cancer potency, we will still observe cancer cases, and there is a need to have stronger evidence about the carcinogenicity evaluation of different types of asbestos fibers, according the result of these evaluations countries will take decisions based in the scientific evaluation.

Meanwhile in Mexico there is a specific regulation regarding management and use of asbestos:

- ❖ Of General Law of Health – control of activities, facilities, products and services
- ❖ Of the safety & hygiene at the work environment
- ❖ Registration, imports and export permits for pesticides, plant nutrients and toxic and dangerous substances and dangerous materials
- ❖ Mandatory specifications to protect the health of people who is occupational exposed to the risk factor and the surrounding environments.
- ❖ It is mandatory in all facilities that process asbestos fiber