

NEWSLETTER

Newsletter from the Chrysotile Institute

For safe and responsible
use of chrysotile

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR OF A CANADIAN NEWSPAPER CONCERNING ASBESTOS

Too often in the medias, the information on "asbestos" is incomplete, selective and misleading. An Editorial published in a Canadian newspaper "Whatever you call it, asbestos is deadly" on September 28, 2009 is a clear demonstration of inaccurate, incomplete information.

The Editorial states that some *90,000 people die each year from asbestos-related lung cancer, mesothelioma and asbestosis, according to the World Health Organization*. Unfortunately, few people would bother to scrutinize the validity and completeness of such numbers. But a careful examination of the Concha-Barrientos et al (2004)¹ report published by the WHO, shows that the above statement is grossly misleading, in that it represents only selected parts of the report, which obviously suits the agenda of some ideologues. Here are the facts and the complete conclusions of the Concha-Barrientos report.

First, the Concha-Barrientos et al report acknowledges that there is a difference in risk between chrysotile and the amphibole varieties of asbestos. In chapter 21, p.1687, the authors state:

"Currently, about 125 million people in the world are exposed to asbestos at the workplace. According to global estimates at least 90,000 people die each year from asbestos-related lung cancer." But the authors also add: "In 20 studies of over 100,000 asbestos workers, the standardized mortality rate ranged from 1.04 for chrysotile workers to 4.97 for amosite workers, with a combined relative risk of 2.00. It is difficult to determine the exposures involved because few of

the studies reported measurements, and because it is a problem to convert historical asbestos measurements in millions of dust particles per cubic foot to gravimetric units. Nevertheless, little excess lung cancer is expected from low exposure levels."

Second, the Concha-Barrientos report echoes the benchmark publication by Hodgson and Darnton (2000)² in which the specific risk of cancer death is addressed. These authors calculated the risks for mesothelioma on the assumption that exposure commenced some time between the ages of 20 and 45 years and ceased at age 65 years. Assuming a **mixed fibre type**, the lifetime risk of cancer death is approximately 100/100,000 fibre.year per ml. This combined estimate is based on best estimates of risk for different cumulative exposures categories. For cumulative exposures of between 10 and 100 f/ml.years, the risks are: **400 deaths per 100,000 exposed for each f/ml.year of cumulative exposure for crocidolite, 65/100,000 for amosite and 2/100,000 for chrysotile.**

According to the publication by Hodgson and Darnton (2000)², **for cumulative exposures of 0.1 f/ml.years, the risks are respectively 100 deaths per 100,000 exposed for crocidolite; 15 deaths per 100,000 exposed for amosite and "probably insignificant" for chrysotile.**

The Editorial states that most developed countries have banned its use, including the European Union in 2005. While this may be the public misperception, it is important to note that chrysotile asbestos, different from the other amphiboles varieties (crocidolite and

