



Report - Workshops on asbestos in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, FYR Macedonia and Russia

Asbestos is a very serious but neglected threat, especially in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Therefore WHO European Region decided to finance workshops in four Eastern European and Central Asian countries. The main goal of the workshops was to inform multipliers about the effects asbestos has on human health and the environment and to point out where in our daily lives we are exposed to it; and to develop awareness raising activities. The partner organizations and invited experts presented information on the issue, which have been discussed in round tables. The workshops were organized mainly by our partner organizations BIOM in Kyrgyzstan, Social Ecological Forum in Kazakhstan, Journalists for Human Rights in FYR Macedonia and Eco Accord in Russia. Together with WECF they invited representatives from environmental ministries, local and regional committees, NGOs and scientists. In Russia, Kazakhstan and FYR Macedonia the workshops took place on December 12, 2013; and in Kyrgyzstan on December 23, 2013. All four workshops were a great success with active participation of all participants. Thanks to WHO Euro the local and also regional experts were able to discuss the use of asbestos, asbestos related diseases, legal and political aspects and asbestos waste management.

Content of the workshops

The workshops were developed based on the specific needs and situation of the four target countries. The aim of the workshops was to inform key stakeholders in each country about the topic of asbestos and related problems, and to foster and build on previous work in EECCA region countries of WHO and WECF with interested actors from various sectors to achieve progress in informing the public and experts, and advocating for a better legislation of asbestos, and improve the living and working conditions of the general public.

The sessions of the workshops focused on the specific country situations, asbestos related diseases, and on advocacy and awareness raising work. Participants were encouraged to brainstorm and develop strategies for their countries to move the issue of asbestos higher on the political and public agenda to finally achieve better legislation and protection for citizens and workers. In the beginning experts addressed country specific problems and their consequences, followed by a Q&A session as well as discussion round tables. Those round tables were thought to find proposals for the further dealing with asbestos problems.

Attendees discussed the current situation and what could be done to raise public awareness and protect the people. Ideas were collected and further activities were planned. Interestingly



the participants of the different countries came up with a lot of diverging proposals for the handling of the asbestos related challenges in their countries.

Summary and outlook

WECF sees a very high potential for further activities in Russia, Macedonia and Kyrgyzstan. In Kazakhstan the prerequisites are more difficult due to the very strong asbestos lobby, the high degree of involvement of the Kazakh government and the low awareness of civil society. The partner organizations are very well trained on the related topics of asbestos and have a high capacity and willingness to continue and broaden their activities. They collected many very valuable ideas for activities on which we would like to build on in the future.

Workshop in FYR Macedonia

In Skopje experts from various institutions and local journalists met to discuss the impacts asbestos has on human health and the environment. 18 experts, four members of “Journalists for Human Rights” and another four journalists attended the workshop. It was divided into three parts. The first part was dedicated to national policy on asbestos and the issue of asbestos related diseases and the second part covered the involvement of NGOs and the media. Main speakers were:

- Dr. Igor Nedelovski on the current asbestos situation in FYR Macedonia and the Western Balkan countries, highlighting that further public campaigning is urgently needed.
- Jordan Minov from the Ministry of Environment referred about existing laws and that they are not implemented sufficiently, and that an ARD register should be established.
- Margarita Spasenova from WHO office in Skopje explaining WHO activities and stated that WHO office in Skopje will make asbestos one of their prior subjects.
- Alexandra Caterbow, WECF, Skype presentation about lessons learned in the EU

In the second part of the workshop the participants planned further actions. It was discussed to forward an action plan to national authorities and continue the good cooperation with ministries. Also FYR Macedonia adopted several EU laws to ban asbestos, started a national program to phase it out and established a multi-sectorial governmental working group on the topic. The group identified the following next steps to be taken in FYR Macedonia:

- Establish a register for people with asbestos related diseases
- Start a public campaign
- Subsidize everybody who is willing to remove asbestos-contaminated materials



Workshop in Kazakhstan

At the same day in Kazakhstan, experts discussed the same topic in context with their country. Here asbestos mining is especially a problem on which the Executive Director Kaisha Atakhanova of the “Social-Ecological Fund“ NGF gave an interesting speech. She also opened the workshop and introduced the speakers. The workshop was divided in two parts: introductions by key speakers in the morning and in the afternoon discussion and Q&A session. Unfortunately there was no participation of governmental representatives, since the focal point of the Rotterdam Convention, who seems to be the only person in the Ministry dealing with asbestos issues, is on maternity leave and no replacement was installed. Unfortunately, the chrysotile association was present at the workshop, presenting their well-known pro-asbestos position. In Kazakhstan it is difficult for NGOs to work on the issue of asbestos, since the government is strongly supporting asbestos use and mining. For safety reasons, especially for our local partners, we do not have a non-communication policy with asbestos industry in Kazakhstan.

The main outcome of the workshop:

- Interest of academia in health related aspects of asbestos in Kazakhstan is increasing, therefore a series of lectures on ARDs at the medical universities should be established
- Still there is a lot of awareness raising among NGOs needed, since they feel that compared to other environmental issues in the country, like uranium, oil, gas and heavy metal mining, asbestos is not very important, and the chances to achieve any change are very low.



Workshop presentation



Asbestos mining

Workshop in Russia

The meeting was organized by the WECF partner organisation Eco Accord, on the 12th of December, and aimed at improving understanding and raising awareness on asbestos health effects, asbestos productions and use, waste management and available safer alternatives.

Presentations were focused on recent developments in asbestos production and use in Russia, reasons of economic losses faced by asbestos industry, current situation with management of asbestos wastes, asbestos health effects with evidences from different countries. Presenters also highlighted the need for more information on available alternatives and their production in Russia.

An issue of producer responsibility was raised in connection with asbestos export to developing countries. WHO and ILO position on elimination of asbestos related diseases was presented together with a detailed work plan for the development of national programme on elimination of asbestos related diseases.

A world café held during the second part of the workshop helped the participants brainstorm on further steps on asbestos outreach campaign in Russia. The following activities were suggested:

Strengthening regulation on manufacture and use of asbestos containing products, and waste management in Russia

Activities:

- Analyze the existing national legislation on production and use of asbestos and asbestos waste management and its implementation
- Collect examples of the use of asbestos products, including the use of asbestos products in construction, and waste management in Russia and developing countries where asbestos is exported
- Analyze coincidence between national legislation on asbestos and international requirements on production and use of asbestos and waste management



- Analyze legislation on production and use of asbestos and waste management in other countries (EU, US, others)
- Develop recommendations for the harmonization of the national legislation and international requirements
- Develop recommendations on strengthening occupational safety regulations
- Develop a draft regulation would require building owners to identify places in which asbestos-containing materials are present.
- Conduct roundtables and workshops on the outcomes of the analysis on asbestos related legislation with federal and local authorities and industrial facilities
- Present recommendations to the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Environment

Analyze the existing legal system of providing compensation to victims of asbestos related diseases (health insurance system)

Activities:

- Conduct interviews with managers of industrial facilities to collect information about the level of asbestos related diseases and occupational safety
- Conduct similar interviews with health professionals working at the facilities
- Conduct interviews with workers on occupational safety measures
- Analyze the implementation of the national legislation on occupational safety and its implementation at the asbestos facilities
- Analyze the existing system of providing compensation to asbestos victims in Russia and in other countries
- Provide recommendations on improving Russian national system of providing compensation to asbestos victims based on the most progressive systems in other countries
- Organize trainings for attorneys to educate them on asbestos exposure and health effects
- Prepare a booklet on the most well known court cases on asbestos

Working with people affected by asbestos

Activities:

- Collect information about people affected by asbestos in Russia including construction workers
- Find out the level of compensation provided to asbestos victims
- Establish a group of asbestos victims
- Establish a clearing house on asbestos and a hot line for emergency actions
- Prepare information and awareness materials on asbestos production, use and health effects
- Establish contacts with medical professionals working on asbestos related diseases
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Suggestions for asbestos profile and national action plan on elimination of asbestos related diseases

Activities:

- Develop a register of patients with asbestos related diseases
- Develop a list of asbestos facilities with high risk of exposure



- Assess a number of people exposed to asbestos
- Establish contacts with managers of the facilities, workers, medical professionals
- Develop a program to monitor levels of asbestos concentrations in the asbestos mining towns in Russia
- Develop a programme to monitor the safe management of asbestos in schools, kindergartens, social centers, health and municipal public buildings
- Develop recommendations on improvement of recording of asbestos related diseases
- Organize a conference to present findings and recommendations developed in the frame of these activities
- Publish findings and recommendations in a peer review magazine
- Organize meetings and round tables with the Ministry of Health to present findings and recommendations

Suggestions for a broad outreach campaign on elimination of asbestos production and use

Activities:

- Develop awareness and educational materials for broad public distribution
- Develop and broadcast social media advertising films on asbestos health effects
- Develop a documentary film on asbestos in Russia
- Conduct press-conferences in at least 10 regions

Workshop in Kyrgyzstan

In Kyrgyzstan the asbestos workshop was organized by the Ecological movement “BIOM” and the National Center for Health Promotion with support of WECEF and WHO Europe. Main participants were representatives of rural and regional health committees, NGO-members, professors, scientists, the media and representatives from WHO office Kyrgyzstan, and the Ministry of Health Kyrgyzstan. The main focus of the presentations was on health related aspects of asbestos and related positions and perspectives in Kyrgyzstan.

The participants see great potential for an information campaign and lobbying via the newly established Village Health Committees (VHC), which are independent public organizations in 70 % of all villages in Kyrgyzstan. Up to now, 1.500 VHCs have been established as in Kyrgyzstan. The work of Health Committees aims to work towards the prevention of many diseases among the rural population, they are collaborating with medical professionals of their district and regional hospitals. In addition, the health committees are implementing their own initiatives to improve the welfare of the people in the villages and support low-income families. The "Community Action for Health" Program, which promotes independent work communities and the development of partnerships with the health system, has been established.

The following ideas for activities were collected during the brainstorming session:

- Involve VHCs to conduct informational meetings, dissemination of information (e.g. fliers and videos)
- Conduct round tables on the dangers of asbestos in regions - cascaded way



- Develop social media videos about the dangers of asbestos, broadcast on TV, burn on DVD discs (around 2000 copies for each VHC)
- Award and competition among VHCs on raising awareness about the asbestos issues
- Develop training sessions for teachers, promotion events, posters on safety in schools and other educational institutions;
- Publish information material in Kyrgyz language
- Establish monitoring activities in villages, communities for the presence of asbestos waste
- Organize public petitions on the issue of asbestos
- Conduct special public hearings on this issue in the Parliament of the Kyrgyz Republic
- Establish a one day symbolic event against the use of asbestos throughout the country
- Conduct a study of best practice of asbestos disposal in the regions of Kyrgyzstan



Asbestos wokshop in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan