ROCA

Rotterdam Convention Alliance

Chrysotile and the Rotterdam Convention

FAQ

Is the listing of chrysotile asbestos under Annex III of the Rotterdam Convention a ban?

No, the Convention does not include an objective to ban chemicals. It is an important international information tool that gives countries a right to control their borders through the prior informed consent (pic) process.

Countries are allowed to grant permission for imports of chrysotile asbestos. There is no limit of volume or any other restriction regarding import and export.

Replacing an asbestos gasket, © ROCA/GAAA

The PIC procedure is a mechanism for formally obtaining and disseminating the decisions of importing Parties as to whether they wish to receive future shipments of those chemicals listed in Annex III of the Convention and for ensuring compliance with these decisions by exporting Parties.

- For each chemical listed in Annex III of the Convention, and therefore subject to the PIC procedure, a Decision Guidance Document (DGD) is prepared and sent to all Parties (Article 7). The DGD is intended to help governments to assess the risks connected with the handling and use of the chemical and make more informed decisions about future import and use of the chemical, taking into account of local conditions.
- Parties are required to take a decision as to whether they will allow future import of each of the chemicals in Annex III (Article 10). These decisions, known as import responses, are published by the Secretariat and made available to all Parties every six months through the PIC Circular and on the Convention's website in the section Import Responses. In this way, Parties are informed prior to an export as to whether or not there will be consent to import.
- Import decisions taken by Parties must be trade neutral. That is, if the Party decides not to accept imports of a specific chemical, it must also stop domestic production of that particular chemical for domestic use and refuse imports from any source, including from countries that are not Party to the Convention.
- All exporting Parties are required to ensure that exports of chemicals subject to the PIC procedure do not occur contrary to the decision of each importing Party (Article 11). They should ensure that import responses published in the PIC Circular are immediately communicated to their exporters, industry and any other relevant authorities, such as the Department of Customs.

Source: http://www.pic.int/Procedures/PICProcedure/tabid/1364/language/en-US/Default.aspx

April, 2015

How does the listing affect national industry working with chrysotile asbestos?

In general, if the importing country accepts the request of the exporting country, there are no changes for the importing and exporting country. However, under the Rotterdam Convention there is an obligation for listed substances to provide additional information to accompany exported substances:

- the shipping document should bear the code (in case there is one) when exported
- labelling requirements that ensure the adequate availability of information regarding hazards to human health and environment
- for substances for occupational purposes, a safety data sheet (up to date information in international recognized format) should be sent to each importer in the official language(s) of the importer

Besides the provision of the required information, there is no substantial change for asbestos producers and asbestos processing companies. Import and export is still fully allowed.

Why does the vast majority of governments support the listing of chrysotile asbestos?

Chrysotile asbestos is proven to be a hazardous substance, which must be controlled. Due to this fact, based on scientific evidence, the Chemical Review Committee recommended chrysotile asbestos for listing under Annex III of the Rotterdam Convention. Governments therefore voted, with very little exemptions, for a listing. They would like to know when such substances are imported to their countries, to protect their citizens and environment. The Rotterdam Convention is a tool to provide and exchange information and to help governments to protect their borders. As the African Group said at COP6, if the Rotterdam Convention does not achieve consensus on the listing of chrysotile asbestos and therefore is not a functioning tool for border protection, countries could consider banning chrysotile asbestos instead.

Is chrysotile asbestos less dangerous than other forms of asbestos?

Asbestos (actinolite, amosite, anthophyllite, chrysotile, crocidolite and tremolite) has been classified by the International Agency for Research on Cancer as being carcinogenic to humans.[1] Chrysotile asbestos can cause cancer of the lung, larynx, and ovary, mesothelioma and asbestosis. There is no threshold for the carcinogenic risk of chrysotile asbestos. Even though the asbestos industry claims that chrysotile asbestos is less dangerous than other forms of asbestos, it makes no difference for the dying persons and their beloved ones.

Are only people who work directly with asbestos at risk of developing asbestos related diseases?

No. There are many cases of wives and children of asbestos workers, people working in asbestos contaminated buildings like teachers, and people living close to asbestos mines and production sites, who developed mesothelioma. Not only secondary exposure can lead to asbestos related diseases, also environmental exposure does. Governments report of individuals suffering from mesothelioma due to exposure during renovation, ambient air or because of asbestos containing waste, which was not stored properly.
For those victims it is incredibly difficult to get any compensation.

Asbestos containing roofing materials, © ROCA/GAAA

Contact
www.rocalliance.org
Kathleen Ruff
Senior Human Rights Adviser
Right on Canada / Rideau Institute
kruff@bulkley.net
www.rightoncanada.ca

Alexandra Caterbow
Coordinator Chemicals
and Health International / ROCA coordination
WECF –
Women in Europ e for a Common Future
alexandra.caterbow@wecf.eu
www.wecf.eu

This publication is financially supported by the Federal Ministry of Environment, Nature Conservation, Construction and Nuclear Safety of Germany, and the German Federal Environment Agency. The responsibility for the content is with the editors.

Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety

ROCA
Rotterdam Convention Alliance