



European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC)
Confédération européenne des syndicats (CES)

ASBESTOS SHOULD BE COVERED BY THE ROTTERDAM CONVENTION

The European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) is concerned by the direction taken by the negotiations under way on the inclusion of chrysotile asbestos on the list of substances covered by the Rotterdam Convention. This week, the countries that signed the Convention met up in Rome to decide whether or not to add two pesticides and chrysotile asbestos to the list.

"It's unacceptable for chrysotile asbestos to once again escape the regulatory mechanisms for hazardous substances provided for by the Rotterdam Convention. The lives of hundreds of thousands of workers are at risk, as is the credibility of the Convention", said ETUC Confederal Secretary Walter Cerfeda, in charge of health and safety at work.

Canada is supposedly once again trying to form a coalition of countries to block the inclusion of chrysotile on the list of substances covered by the Rotterdam Convention.

"At a time when dozens of workers in Europe are dying every day of diseases caused by their exposure to asbestos, the trade union movement cannot reconcile itself to seeing workers in developing countries exposed to this fatal substance", stressed ETUC.

The World Health Organisation believes that asbestos causes 100,000 deaths a year worldwide.

Since the European Union ban on asbestos definitively took effect on 1 January 2005, Canada has been exporting its output primarily to the emerging Asian countries of India, Indonesia and Thailand.

For several years now, the Canadian government has been embarking on a veritable crusade aimed at delaying the imposition of a worldwide ban on asbestos, both via diplomatic channels and by supporting pro-asbestos lobbies.

Despite the EU-wide ban on asbestos, this highly toxic substance is still being intensely traded around the world. According to the European Trade

Union Institute (ETUI), its consumption in China and India has more than doubled over the past 30 years.

Under the Rotterdam Convention, before sending off a hazardous substance, the exporting country must issue a warning to the importing country so that it can decide, in full knowledge of the facts, whether or not to accept delivery of the substance in question. The Convention was adopted by 126 countries in 1998.

To find out more, see the special report "Asbestos in the world", <http://hesa.etui-rehs.org/uk/newsletter/files/Newsletter27p7-21.pdf>

The European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) exists to speak with a single voice at European level on behalf of the common interests of workers. Founded in 1973, it now represents 82 trade union organisations in 36 European countries, plus 12 industry-based federations.

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