



NORDISKA BYGGNADS- OCH TRÄARBETAREFEDERATIONEN
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Declaration from NFBWW on asbestos

Asbestos is still haunting – for how long ?

The Nordic countries were among the first in the world to realize that there is only one safe way of protection against the dangerous asbestos: Ban on any kind of use. Therefore in the Nordic countries bans were gradually introduced from beginning of the 1970'es and to the end of the 1980'es.

It takes many years for the lethal complications after exposure to asbestos to develop. Therefore we still face in these years the fatal consequences of many years' asbestos-use. Even if nobody theoretically from today was no longer exposed to asbestos, we will not, due to the long latency period of these diseases until about year 2060 be able to eliminate the diseases as for instance the lethal mesothelioma. So better today than tomorrow a final solution for the asbestos problems must be initiated.

In the Nordic countries there have during the recent years been dramatic disclosures of one scandal after another concerning asbestos – for example in water pipes, urban trains, ships, ventilation ducts, sports arenas and hospitals. Such disclosures show that even more than 20 years after the bans there is still a long way to go until we have solved the asbestos problem. It is a fact that construction workers in the Nordic countries are still at risk of being exposed to asbestos.

Asbestos has been used in alarmingly many products and branches, but the major part of the asbestos has been used and it still existing in buildings. Especially asbestos in buildings is posing a danger to construction workers as well as tenants and users of asbestos-containing buildings.

In many years it has been common practice to encapsulate or seal indoor asbestos-containing materials. The original argument was that it would be much too expensive removing all the asbestos. But the recent years' disclosures show that this is far from being enough. The encapsulation is just a postponement of the problem. The only responsible solution is to remove all the asbestos from our surroundings instead of leaving the problem to our grand-children.

There is only one safe way of dealing with asbestos: To get all the asbestos removed from trains, ships and not least buildings. Asbestos can in fact be removed by using safe work methods already available.

The construction workers have the right to know, whether asbestos is present or not in buildings to be refurbished or renovated.

The generations coming into the labour market after the ban of asbestos do not have much knowledge of the nature of asbestos in the single building. Thus they are at risk of dealing with asbestos completely without knowing. The same goes for the increasing number of migrant construction workers.

Therefore there is a remarkable need that national governmental asbestos action plans are tabled, approved and developed, preventing workers and others from a continuous dangerous handling of asbestos. It is not an easy solution. It may take many years, but nevertheless the work has to begin now.

NFBWW recommends:

- That in each country an extensive mapping and registration of asbestos in buildings, trains, ships, water pipes etc. is being carried out.
- That the Nordic Construction Workers' Unions takes initiatives towards the political system in order to raise a debate about national governmental action plans for the phasing out of all existing asbestos.
- That the Nordic countries put pressure on the EU in order to approve an EU-wide action plan for safe removal of all asbestos.
- That extensive information is being tabled, especially targeting younger and migrant construction workers, about handling of asbestos, for example by refurbishments and demolitions.
- That the NFBWW together with EFBWW and BWI sets further focus on the global situation – both in the direction of support to the countries going towards a ban and in the direction of putting increased pressure on the countries still producing and exporting asbestos - primarily Canada, Russia, China, India and Brazil.
- That a clear distancing is made from the so-called international asbestos-alliance of trade unions which – together with the asbestos industry – argues that a safe continuous use of asbestos is possible and desirable.

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