

Tuesday, November 20, 2012

Australia must do more to stop international trade in asbestos

The Australian Government must use its influence to limit the international trade in asbestos and the use of the deadly material in buildings in our region, the ACTU said today.

ACTU president Ged Kearney said that the ACTU would be hosting an international delegation for the next fortnight of unionists from Canada, Laos and India who were trying to limit the future death toll from asbestos in developing countries.

“Asbestos has caused a horrific toll of death and suffering in Australia, and the impact of asbestos-related diseases is not expected to peak until 2030,” Ms Kearney said.

“Asbestos is now banned in Australia, but sadly the asbestos industry has shifted to developing nations.

“The World Health Organisation estimates that over 100,000 die each year from asbestos-related diseases, with 600 of these in Australia.

“The lessons we have learnt in Australia are not being applied in other countries, where the asbestos industry is taking advantage of lax regulation to make a quick dollar.

“The Australian Government must push for a global ban on the international trade of asbestos.

“Australia must do more to reduce the future death toll from asbestos in our region, particularly in countries whose health systems will not be able to cope with a rising number of asbestos-related illnesses.”

Ms Kearney said that the international delegation would tour Sydney today before visiting Melbourne, Adelaide, Perth and Canberra – where it would meet with Federal Ministers.

She said they would lobby for Australia to do more to encourage the use of alternative building materials in South East Asia, to have chrysotile asbestos included in the Rotterdam Convention, which covers the international transfer of hazardous materials, and to move towards a global ban on the international asbestos trade.

“The Australian Government has taken positive steps this year to limit the damage from asbestos in Australia by setting up the Office for Asbestos Safety to oversee the management and removal of asbestos,” Ms Kearney said.

“However this is a global problem and we would like it to do more to limit the use of asbestos internationally.”

For Media Inquiries or to speak to the visiting experts (biographies below) call Ben Ruse on 0409 510 879

Biographies

Mr Larry Stoffman: an Occupational Health & Safety consultant and educator, and has worked closely with Canadian and International labour organizations, the UFCW, Health Canada, Canadian Partnership against Cancer, and Worksafe BC, to name a few. He has developed and implemented joint Occupational Health & Safety programs in a number of industries including retail food, healthcare, industrial processing, and forestry. Larry is an activists in Ban Asbestos Canada, a coalition of labour, public health, environmental and human rights groups, academic and scientific experts, and concerned citizens, victims and their families.

Inpeng Meunviseth: the head of Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) in the Department of Labor Protection of the Lao Federation of Trade Unions (LFTU). Since 2010, the OHS arm of the LFTU has been educating workers in nine companies producing asbestos roof sheeting on the risks of asbestos.

Mr Anup Srivastava: the Education Officer for Building and Wood-workers International South Asia Office based in New Delhi (India). He has been involved in the asbestos campaign in the region and has helped BWI affiliates to take a policy stance on the issue along with awareness activities and campaigns for a ban on asbestos.