



Union Aid Abroad-APHEDA

MEDIA RELEASE

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Cancer Prevention message for Laos a new feature on Australian Embassy Billboards from today

The Australian Embassy in Laos and the Office of the Embassy of Canada in Laos have combined with international development agency Union Aid Abroad – APHEDA in a cancer prevention message for Lao people. From today billboards outside the Australian Embassy at Km 3 will help raise awareness for the public to cancer risks from exposure to chrysotile asbestos and urge Laos to consider alternative, safer substances and products and prevent future lung and other cancers.

Globally, 27% of all work-related deaths are because of cancer, according to the International Labour Organisation (ILO)^[1] – that’s around 742,000 deaths annually. Latest estimates released in November 2018^[2] point to just one product, asbestos, being responsible for 232,000, or almost one-third of that global total.

Australian Ambassador, Jean-Bernard Carrasco, stated ‘Chrysotile asbestos was being used extensively 20-40 years ago in high-income countries such as Australia, North America and the UK. As a result, cancer levels in these countries (from exposure to chrysotile asbestos) are currently much higher than anywhere else in the world. In Australia currently the Australian Government estimates 4,000 people a year are dying from past asbestos exposure’ he said.

While Asia, including Laos, may have low occupational cancer rates now, they will rise in the coming 20 to 30 years reflecting the current use of asbestos. We commend the Lao Government for its work to develop both a National Asbestos Profile and National Action Plan to Eliminate Asbestos Related Diseases including a proposed ban date for asbestos’, he said. The Profile has sounded a warning, as it has revealed Laos to be the highest consumer of asbestos per head in the world. This is very concerning’ he said.

Asbestos fibre is currently imported into Laos mainly for the manufacture of some types of roof sheet. Laos has, in recent years imported 8,000 tons of chrysotile asbestos according to the Lao

^[1] <https://www.personneltoday.com/hr/the-worldwide-challenge-of-occupational-cancer/>

^[2] [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(18\)32225-6/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(18)32225-6/fulltext) pp 1942

government National Profile, employing over 500 workers directly. Those most at risk of exposure include workers producing the roof tiles, communities living around the asbestos factory sites, construction and demolition workers and those mechanics repairing cars and motorbikes.

Canada was until early this century a large producer of asbestos. However in 2011 Canada stopped exporting the deadly fibre and in Dec 2018 will join fellow previous large producer Brazil and 64 other countries around the world in implementing a national ban on asbestos. Canada's Chargé D'Affaires in Laos, Timothy Edwards, commented;

'We are joining with Australia in this important cancer prevention message because of the deadly legacy in our own countries of using this substance. The Government of Canada supports the World Health Organisation (WHO) recommendation that 'the most efficient way to eliminate asbestos-related diseases is to stop using all forms of asbestos'.

ILO convention 139^[3], lays out the most essential principles for prevention and control of workplace carcinogens like asbestos, including:

- replacement of carcinogenic substances by less dangerous ones
- establishment of a list of carcinogens to be prohibited, or made subject to authorisation or to control
- recording of data concerning exposure and exposed workers
- medical surveillance
- information and education

'There are safer substitutes available and this is an opportunity for Laos to ban the use of this deadly product and local companies to position themselves within the green more environmentally friendly industry, to strive for a more sustainable pathway of growth that does not cause harm to workers, community and consumers of the products' said Phillip Hazelton Coordinator of the Eliminating Asbestos Related Diseases Project in Asia for Union aid Abroad APHEDA.

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The Union Aid Abroad - APHEDA Eliminating Asbestos Related Diseases campaign is a part of a global ban asbestos campaign in collaboration with other ban asbestos networks and is supported by trade unions, individual donors, international organisations and the Australian Government through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP).



^[3] https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C139