



Council Member Motion
For the Governance and Priorities Committee Meeting of October 8, 2015

Date: October 2, 2015

From: Councillor Ben Isitt and Councillor Jeremy Loveday

Subject: Workplace health and safety through Asbestos control

Background:

The mining of asbestos has been discontinued in Canada and the country is no longer exporting this product abroad to emerging countries such as India to process. However, the Canadian construction industry continues to bear the imprint of asbestos, in terms of legacy construction materials in buildings and maritime vessels as well as recently and newly imported construction materials. The presence of these materials, often unreported, unpublished and unknown, threatens the health and safety of workers in the building trades as well as occupants of buildings and the users of vessels, with deliberating impacts on individuals with medical conditions arising from exposure to asbestos as well as their families.

The Vancouver Island Building Trades Council and workers in the building and maritime construction industries have requested that all levels of government take action to increase protections for workers in the face of the ongoing health and safety risks of asbestos.

It is therefore proposed that the City of Victoria place itself on record advocating for increased protections to the provincial and federal levels of government, including the establishment of a National Registry of public buildings and maritime vessels containing asbestos and products containing asbestos, as well as examining actions the City can take within its own areas of jurisdiction to increase protections for workers from the health and safety risks of asbestos.

Recommendation:

THAT Council:

- (1) Requests that the Mayor write to the Prime Minister of Canada endorsing the establishment of National Registries of public buildings and public maritime vessels containing asbestos products and requesting a federal ban on the importation of asbestos and building products containing asbestos into Canada;
- (2) Requests that the Mayor write to the Premier of British Columbia, the Minister Responsible for Housing and the Minister of Advanced Education, (1) requesting co-operation with the Federal and Municipal governments in the establishment of National Registries of public buildings and public maritime vessels containing asbestos and building products containing asbestos; (2) proposing more rigorous training in asbestos safety, mitigation and removal within the provincial trades training, apprenticeship and accreditation system; and (3) recommending improvements to the BC Building Code to increase protections for workers from the health and safety risks of asbestos;

- (3) Refers the following motion for consideration during the next quarterly Strategic Priorities review:

THAT Council direct staff to report on options for increasing protections for workers in the building trades through the prohibition of the use of asbestos and building products containing asbestos in construction activities authorized by building permit in the City of Victoria;

AND THAT this report include advice from the Fire Chief on the advisability of prohibiting the use of asbestos and building products containing asbestos in construction activities in the City of Victoria;

AND THAT this report include advice on the resource implications and advisability of including municipal buildings, facilities and maritime vessels in National Registries of public buildings and public maritime vessels containing asbestos and building products containing asbestos.

Respectfully submitted,



Councillor Ben Isitt



Councillor Jeremy Loveday

Attachments.

Letter from Vancouver Island Building Trades Council to Prime Minister of Canada



Vancouver Island

BUILDING TRADES

July 30, 2015

Office of the Prime Minister
80 Wellington Avenue
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A2

Attention: Stephen Harper
The Right Honourable Prime Minister

Re: Asbestos Awareness and Registries

Dear Prime Minister:

I would like to start by thanking you and the federal government for putting the effort into apprenticeship trades training. Without the highest standards and safest learned practices, the construction and maintenance industries would be fraught with many more injuries and fatalities it typically sees.

Which brings me to the reason I'm writing you. As you well know, the mining of asbestos shut-down a couple of years ago, and Canada is no longer exporting this dangerous product abroad to emerging countries like India to process. However, asbestos is not unlike a land mine waiting patiently until someone often not directly involved with the purpose walks innocently by and ends their life. Of course the one is usually immediate, while the other prolongs a person's painful existence, the Canadian construction landscape is checkered with these delayed landmines.

As a 35 year construction and shipyard electrician, I have watched many friends and co-workers diagnosed with pleural plaques on their lungs and asbestosis. This diagnosis is nothing less than a death sentence, they slowly and prematurely wither away, and die an agonizing death due solely from breathing, while at work.

For the past 14 years I have served as the President of Vancouver Island's Building Trades, an organization of approximately 7,000 construction workers, who also move in and out of the west-coast shipbuilding and repair industry.

The proliferation of products containing asbestos throughout the building construction industry over the past 75 and more years will likely go down in modern-day civilized history as one of our worst self-inflicted health care casualties, and it will not subside for many years to come. The best we can hope for is to mitigate its relentless wake.

Therefore, we are calling on the Federal Government as well as all provincial and municipal governments

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to develop and establish a **National Building Registry of all Public Buildings which utilize Building Products containing Asbestos**, and to make that registry online and available to all restoration and construction workers and companies so they may see if the buildings they (will) work in, have asbestos products and what form those products containing the asbestos fibers are in (ie. floor tiles, ceiling tiles, insulation, drywall, pipe and cladding, etc), and how best to remove or disturb each type of product. We are proposing the Building Registry begin with all public buildings, our parliament, legislatures, office and administration buildings, schools, hospitals, city halls, and associated real estate and public work yards.

We are also calling on the Federal and provincial governments which utilize public marine transportation, the Canadian Navy, Coast Guard, Ocean Sciences, and any other publicly owned vessel to develop and establish a **National Vessel Registry of all Maritime Vessels which utilize Products and equipment containing Asbestos**. That the Registry be available online so that Canadian Shipyard Workers can obtain the information on the products that could potentially kill them prior to them beginning work on the particular equipment, system or vessel structure.

When we properly identify and publish the risks construction/shipyard/remediation, and all workers face, the Canadian workforce will be better prepared and we will all benefit from reduced and controlled exposure. That was essentially the national thrust of programs like; "Right to Know" and "WHMIS".

The baby boomer generation is well versed in asbestos we have seen its extraction from our lands, we have used it, we have lived and worked with it all around us. We are on the eve of mass retirement with a new generation of workers who know very little of the harmful effects asbestos exposure can cause.

Therefore, we are calling on the Federal and provincial governments to develop a plan to better educate our youth moving into the construction and heavy industry sectors with the purpose to help identify products made of asbestos and those which can often contain asbestos, by establishing the last week of April as "Asbestos Awareness" week. This would be in-step with our closest neighbour and largest trading partner as the USA have recently proclaimed the first week of April dedicated to the same cause. Why we are suggesting the last week of April as, April 28th is globally known as the "**Day of Mourning**", a day recognized to honour those who lost their lives while at work, and the number one fatal illness in Canada are those workers who died from inhaling asbestos dust. We believe the highest level of respect we can give those who lost their lives while at work is to fight for those who continue to do the job, to educate the living against the dangers, so they can return home to their loved ones.

We are also recommending that a national standard apprenticeship be developed known as "Hazmat Worker" so those that are involved in remediation have the developed skills and knowledge in proper procedure of remediation of asbestos products. Today these workers are lucky to receive any information of the asbestos product they are removing, how to remove it safely and maybe a throwaway pair of coveralls and a dust mask. Many of them are hired by a labour broker as an independent contractor so they have no recourse to the unsafe work.

As a business manager I am responsible for those that come in to visit our establishment, if I ignore the sheet of ice at the front entrance and that causes an individual pain and suffering from their fall our business is liable for that pain and suffering. The asbestos tragedy in our eyes is no different, our governments know of its existence in their buildings, it is the tax payer at some time that will be financially impacted, not necessarily the employer who simply came to pull the data cabling throughout a building disturbing the asbestos dust in the ceiling tiles, causing the workers death.

We look forward to seeing real action with measurable results on this file in the names of those who have lost their lives, their families, as well as those young adults entering the trades today.

Kindest Regards,

Phil Venoit
President,
VI-Building Trades

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