



# 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 28<sup>th</sup> 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.

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**Lastly, we are calling on the Federal Government and provincial governments to move forward on Legislation banning all products containing asbestos to cease being imported into Canada.** We have finally come to grips with what the rest of the world's developed nations have known for decades, products containing asbestos can be fatal from simply drawing a breath of air, something we all do 20-30 thousand times each and every day. Currently, our import laws allow unregulated importation of asbestos products, they can be found in anything from our after-market vehicle brake pads, some types of building piping, laminate flooring and many other products without our knowledge.

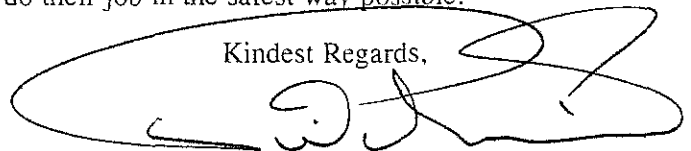
As a business manager I am responsible for those that come in to visit our establishment, if I ignore the sheet of ice at the front entrance and that causes an individual pain and suffering from their fall our business is liable for that pain and suffering. The asbestos tragedy in our eyes is no different, 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.

Canadians look towards their elected officials to champion the causes that serve and protect them, it is our own elected officials who for the past five decades have allowed this travesty to continue and spread with full knowledge of the personal anguish, pain and sorrow it was causing. It is time to write a new chapter on this tragic story, with pages of education, transparency, understanding, and knowledge.

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.

I would like to thank you for your time in reading our recommendations and look forward to a day when every worker can obtain the information they need to do their job in the safest way possible.

Kindest Regards,



Phil Venoit  
President,  
VI-Building Trades

cc. Christy Clark, Premier British Columbia  
Rachel Knotley, Premier Alberta  
Brad Wall, Premier Saskatchewan  
Greg Selinger, Premier Manitoba  
Kathleen Wynne, Premier Ontario  
Philippe Couillard, Premier Quebec  
Stephen McNeil, Premier Nova Scotia  
Brian Gallant, Premier New Brunswick  
Wade MacLauchlan, Premier Prince Edward Island  
Paul Davis, Premier Newfoundland  
Members of Parliament  
Bob Blakely, Executive Director Canadian Building Trades  
Members of the Legislative Assemblies  
Mayor and Council

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