

## OHS Canada, 10/31/2008

---

Chrysotile asbestos not being added to international danger list: Ottawa

By The Canadian Press

OTTAWA -- Chrysotile asbestos is not being added to a list of dangerous substances after a lack of consensus at an international meeting in Rome this week, according to the federal Natural Resources Department.

And NDP MP Pat Martin, who was in Rome for what is known as the Rotterdam Convention, said Canada did not even participate in the discussions, even though it is one of the most important exporters of the controversial fibre.

India, Pakistan and Vietnam, the main importers of chrysotile asbestos from Canada, led the charge against adding it to the list.

Martin, who supports adding the fibre to the list, said it appears Canada is making "progress."

He said Canadian representatives were at the forefront defending chrysotile asbestos two years ago, while this time they remained silent and got others to do their work for them.

In the days leading up to the international forum, government officials refused to disclose Canada's position on chrysotile asbestos. It became a hot topic after the Canadian Medical Association Journal ran an editorial slamming Ottawa for promoting exports of the potentially harmful material.

The article likened the practice of shipping chrysotile asbestos to developing countries to arms trading.

During the last round of negotiations two years ago, Canada was among the most vocal opponents of the plan to add chrysotile to the list and was the only western nation to take that position.

While the fibre has been recognized as a cancer-causing agent by a number of countries as well as the World Health Organization, Canada has maintained it can be used safely.

Jasmine MacDonnell, a spokeswoman for the federal natural resources minister, said Tuesday that Ottawa has for many years promoted the responsible use of chrysotile asbestos and that there are a number of rules, programs and best practices in place to ensure that.

While the Rotterdam Convention does not ban trade in listed substances, it requires

countries to give prior informed consent that they are aware they are buying harmful materials before they can be shipped.

Chrysotile is the only form of asbestos that is still used commercially, primarily as an additive to cement. Only two mines still exist in Canada. Both are located in Quebec and employ a total of approximately 700 people.

Martin believes international pressure to end mining of chrysotile asbestos will eventually be too much for Canada to bear.

The Canadian delegation in Rome is headed by a civil servant from the Foreign Affairs Department. Others in the Italian capital include representatives from the federal health, environment and natural resources departments. Quebec officials are also in attendance.

The conference continues through Friday.

[Copyright \(c\) 2008 The Canadian Press](#)