

# Canada: Stop playing politics with asbestos, union and health groups tell Harper

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## Groups make toxic mineral an election issue

Health Organizations, Unions push Harper on Asbestos Ban

“Put people’s lives ahead of politics, Mr Harper,” groups urge.

In an open letter sent today, over twenty health, union and environmental organisations call on Prime Minister Harper to end his support for the asbestos trade.

Harper is today holding his second rally in Asbestos, Quebec (population around 7,000 in a country of 33 million), seeking votes by promoting himself as the political leader most dedicated to the asbestos industry.

“We call on you to put people’s lives ahead of politics,” said Dr Kapil Khatter of the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment. “Canada’s leading medical authorities have all told you that the export of asbestos is medically and morally indefensible and will lead to an epidemic of asbestos-related disease and death overseas.”

Canada was the world’s biggest asbestos exporter in the last century, but the asbestos industry is now bankrupt and about to die out. The last operating asbestos mine in Canada is in Thetford Mines, Quebec. It is under bankruptcy protection and is laying off some of its 350 workers because its asbestos deposit will soon be exhausted.

“Public policy should be based on science, not on politics,” said Christian Simard, executive director, Nature Québec. “The science is indisputable that all forms of asbestos are deadly. Not a single reputable authority supports P.M. Harper’s policy that asbestos can be safely used.

“Canada is becoming known as an immoral asbestos pusher and as an enemy of global public health,” said Kathleen Ruff, senior human rights adviser to the Rideau Institute. “This is not the role Canadians want to play in the world.”

Harper has promised to block an upcoming meeting of the U.N. Environmental Convention (Rotterdam Convention) so as to prevent chrysotile asbestos being listed as a hazardous substance. Chrysotile asbestos represents 100% of the global asbestos trade.

“P.M. Harper is the only national leader in Canada and in the Western world to promote asbestos,” said Dr Khatter. “This election is about trust and integrity. We are urgently pleading with P.M. Harper: Show integrity by respecting the science and put human life ahead of partisan political interests. We hope he will listen.”

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## SIGNATORIES OF THE OPEN LETTER TO PM HARPER:

Rideau Institute

Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment

Nature Québec

International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers, Canada

Sierra Club Canada

International Longshore & Warehouse Union Canada

Maîtres chez nous-21e siècle, Québec

Syndicat des débardeurs de Montréal, SCFP Section locale 375

British Columbia & Yukon Territory Building & Construction Trades Council

Prevent Cancer Now

Atlantic Coast District, International Longshoremen's Association

Canadian Society for Asbestos Victims

MiningWatch Canada

Asbestos-related Research, Education and Advocacy Fund

Boilermakers Lodge 359

Sheet Metal Local 280

International Union of Bricklayers and Allied Craftworkers Union Local #2

BCBC Ferry & Marine Worker's Union

IBEW Local 993, Northern B.C. & Yukon

I L A, Local 1657, Montréal

International Union of Operating Engineers, Local 115

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\* <http://www.rightoncanada.ca/?p=989>