

Minister
of Natural Resources



Ministre
des Ressources naturelles

Ottawa, Canada K1A 0E4

MAY 14 2010

24 MAY 2010

Mr. John Flanagan
Merseyside Asbestos Victims Support Group
Suite 32, 2nd Floor, Oriel Chambers
14 Water Street
Liverpool L2 8TD
UNITED KINGDOM

Dear Mr. Flanagan:

The Honourable Leona Aglukkaq, Minister of Health, has forwarded to me a copy of your letter of January 6, 2010, in which you express some concerns related to asbestos.

It is important first to clarify how we use the term "asbestos." A great deal of confusion arises from the common use of the generic commercial term "asbestos" to describe two different and distinct classes of mineral fibres found naturally in rock formations around the world: amphibole and serpentine.

Chrysotile, the only "asbestos" fibre produced and exported from Canada, belongs to the serpentine class. Serpentine minerals are structurally and chemically different from the amphiboles. Chrysotile is the only "asbestos" fibre that does not belong to the amphibole group. The risk posed by using chrysotile fibres can be managed if adequate controls, such as those established in Canada, are implemented and completely observed.

In 1979, the Government of Canada adopted the controlled-use approach to asbestos. This means that, through the enforcement of appropriate regulations to rigorously control exposure to chrysotile, the health risks associated with processes and products can be reduced to acceptable levels.

Chrysotile is regulated under the *Hazardous Products Act*. The objective of the regulations is to prevent the exposure of consumers to products containing or consisting entirely of any type of asbestos and which can readily shed loose fibres that can be inhaled and cause adverse health effects. Canada does not ban naturally-occurring substances. Canada manages the risks of products and practices derived from these substances where and when required and applicable. Where exposures and subsequent risks cannot be properly managed, the specific uses are discontinued or prohibited.

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