

# Position Statement on Asbestos

*from the*

## Joint Policy Committee

*of the*

### Societies of Epidemiology (JPC-SE)

**June 4, 2012**

The Joint Policy Committee (JPC) of the Societies of Epidemiology (SE) is a consortium of epidemiology societies and organisations, national and international in scope. The JPC-SE originated in 2006 at the 2<sup>nd</sup> North American Congress of Epidemiology to coordinate and unify joint policy actions globally among epidemiology societies. The lead organisers of that Congress (the American College of Epidemiology, the Society for Epidemiologic Research, and the Epidemiology Section of the American Public Health Association), in conjunction with the Canadian Society for Epidemiology and Biostatistics, took the leading roles in the formation of the JPC-SE, which now numbers 13 member organisations. The American College of Epidemiology provides substantial administrative and logistical support to its activities.

This Position Statement on Asbestos was developed by representatives of 12 of our member societies, in consultation with these societies. On June 4<sup>th</sup>, 2012, the JPC-SE approved this Position Statement. Each member organisation then followed its own endorsement process, such as the recusal of its leadership members when appropriate or necessary, such as for some government employees or for those with conflicting interests. Some individual epidemiologists hold the position that epidemiologists should not play any role in advocacy. Some of our member organisations, as per their own internal policies, do not issue or publicly endorse any specific statements. The Complete Position Statement can be accessed at: <http://www.jpc-se.org/documents/03.JPC-SE-Position Statement on Asbestos-June 4 2012-Full Statement and Appendix A.pdf>.

**Endorsers of this Statement are included as Appendix A (JPC-SE Organisations; attached at end), [Appendix B](#) (other Endorsing Organisations), and [Appendix C](#) (Individual Endorsers).**

For more information, contact the Chair of the JPC-SE (Professor Stanley H. Weiss, MD) by e-mail at [JPCSE.Chair@gmail.com](mailto:JPCSE.Chair@gmail.com), or by writing to Dr. Weiss care of the American College of Epidemiology (address immediately below).

The Joint Policy Committee of the Societies of Epidemiology provides a forum for surveillance of and communication about funding, regulatory, and legislative environments relating to epidemiologic research and practice. Through coordinated joint action, the Committee strives to impact policies and influence opinion leaders relevant to policies that rely on epidemiologic evidence.

#### Contact

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# **POSITION STATEMENT ON ASBESTOS**

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

A rigorous review of the epidemiologic evidence confirms that all types of asbestos fibre are causally implicated in the development of various diseases and premature death. Numerous well-respected international and national scientific organisations, through an impartial and rigorous process of deliberation and evaluation, have concluded that all forms of asbestos are capable of inducing mesothelioma, lung cancer, asbestosis and other diseases<sup>1</sup>. These conclusions are based on the full body of evidence, including the epidemiology, toxicology, industrial hygiene, biology, pathology, and other related literature published to the time of the respective evaluations.

Industrialised countries have virtually ceased using asbestos and over 50 countries have passed laws banning its use. Consequently, the asbestos industry, to establish new markets, is promoting the use of asbestos in low-to-middle income countries, particularly in Asia, and has created lobby organisations to achieve this goal.

In spite of the scientific evidence and calls to end all use of asbestos by many organisations including the World Health Organization, the World Federation of Public Health Associations, the International Commission on Occupational Health, the International Social Security Association, the International Trade Union Confederation and the World Bank, the use of asbestos is increasing in low-to-middle income countries. There is little awareness in these countries of the risk that asbestos poses to health; in addition, safety regulations are weak to non-existent. If unstopped, this continued and increasing use of asbestos will lead to a public health disaster of asbestos-related illness and premature death for decades to come in those countries, repeating the epidemic we are witnessing today in industrialised countries that used asbestos in the past.

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<sup>1</sup> IARC, 2012; LaDou et al, 2010; ATSDR, 2001; NTP, 2011; NIOSH, 1972.

Therefore, the Joint Policy Committee of the Societies of Epidemiology (JPC-SE), comprising epidemiologists from around the world:

- Calls for a global ban on the mining, use, and export of all forms of asbestos;
- Calls specifically on the major asbestos exporting countries – Brazil, Canada, Kazakhstan, and Russia – to respect the right to health by ceasing the mining, use, and export of asbestos, and providing transition assistance to their asbestos-mining communities;
- Calls specifically on the major asbestos-using countries – Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Iran, Kazakhstan, Russia, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, and Vietnam – to cease use of asbestos;
- Urges sister societies of epidemiology and/or public health organisations and agencies, particularly in those countries that continue to mine, use and/or export asbestos, such as Brazil, Canada, China, India, Indonesia, Iran, Kazakhstan, Russia, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, and Vietnam, to adopt a position calling for a ban on the mining, use, and export of all forms of asbestos;
- Urges all countries that have used asbestos to inform their citizens and their healthcare professionals of the hazards of asbestos and to implement safety measures to monitor the health of exposed citizens. To facilitate this, an inventory of asbestos already in place is needed, particularly in schools and places where children are present; and
- Urges all sister societies of epidemiology and/or public health organisations and agencies to support the right of scientists and academics to carry out their work free from intimidation. In situations where the asbestos industry files legal cases to silence scientists and academics, societies of epidemiology and/or public health organisations and agencies are urged to examine the situation and, if warranted by the facts, to support the scientists or academics being threatened and to denounce such tactics of intimidation. The procedure developed by the International Society for Environmental Epidemiology for dealing with beleaguered colleagues could be followed as a model. It is available at:

<http://www.iseepi.org/About/Docs/iseeprocedurefordealingwithbeleagueredcolleagues.pdf>

## APPENDIX A

### NINE JPC-SE MEMBER ORGANISATIONS HAVE ENDORSED THE POSITION STATEMENT ON ASBESTOS AS OF JULY 24, 2012\*

<u>Member Organisation</u>	<u>Organisation contact(s):</u>	<u>e-Mail address(es)</u>
<b>JPC-SE Chair</b>	Stanley H. Weiss	<a href="mailto:JPCSE.Chair@gmail.com">JPCSE.Chair@gmail.com</a>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>American College of Epidemiology (ACE)</b></li> <li>• <b>American Public Health Association (APHA), Epidemiology Section</b></li> <li>• <b>Canadian Society for Epidemiology and Biostatistics (CSEB)</b></li> <li>• <b>Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists (CSTE)</b></li> <li>• <b>International Epidemiological Association (IEA)</b></li> <li>• <b>International Society for Environmental Epidemiology (ISEE)</b></li> <li>• <b>National Association of County &amp; City Health Officials (NACCHO) Epidemiology Workgroup</b></li> <li>• <b>Society for Epidemiologic Research (SER)</b></li> <li>• <b>Society for the Analysis of African American Public Health Issues (SAAPHI)</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Robert A. Hiatt</li> <li>Robert E. McKeown</li> <li>James A. Gaudino, Jr.</li> <li>Wiley D. Jenkins</li> <li>Robin Taylor Wilson</li>   <li>Colin L. Soskolne</li>   <li>Pat McConnon</li>   <li>Eduardo Franco</li>   <li>Wael Al-Delaimy</li>   <li>E. Oscar Alleyne</li>   <li>Sandro Galea</li>   <li>Rebecca Hasson</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="mailto:rhiatt@epi.ucsf.edu">rhiatt@epi.ucsf.edu</a></li> <li><a href="mailto:rmckeown@mailbox.sc.edu">rmckeown@mailbox.sc.edu</a></li> <li><a href="mailto:jag8nw@comcast.net">jag8nw@comcast.net</a></li> <li><a href="mailto:wjenkins@siu.edu">wjenkins@siu.edu</a></li> <li><a href="mailto:rwilson@psu.edu">rwilson@psu.edu</a></li>   <li><a href="mailto:colin.soskolne@ualberta.ca">colin.soskolne@ualberta.ca</a></li>   <li><a href="mailto:pmccconnon@cste.org">pmccconnon@cste.org</a></li>   <li><a href="mailto:eduardo.franco@mcgill.ca">eduardo.franco@mcgill.ca</a></li>   <li><a href="mailto:walalaimy@ucsd.edu">walalaimy@ucsd.edu</a></li>   <li><a href="mailto:alleyneo@co.rockland.ny.us">alleyneo@co.rockland.ny.us</a></li>   <li><a href="mailto:sgalea@columbia.edu">sgalea@columbia.edu</a></li>   <li><a href="mailto:hassonr@umich.edu">hassonr@umich.edu</a></li> </ul>

\* For some organisations, some board members may have abstained from voting or voted against support for the Position Statement; the reader may obtain further information directly from the organisational contact listed. Organisation names are alphabetic, along with their designated contact(s) and respective e-mail address(es).