

World Health Organization Soliciting Comments on Asbestos Policy Document

The World Health Organization is now developing an action plan and is calling for comments on a 4-page policy paper by Sept. 9. This is potentially a very important advance in the global public health struggle over asbestos. Worldwide asbestos consumption has remained at around half of historic peak levels for the past decade, as many countries banned asbestos and reduced their use of it while other countries increased asbestos use. The web address for the draft document inviting comment and WHO's introduction follow. The main contact person on this at WHO is Dr. Ivan D. Ivanov ivanovi@who.int

http://www.who.int/occupational_health/publications/asbestos_policy/en/

Draft WHO policy paper on elimination of asbestos-related diseases

The health risks of different types of asbestos and its substitutes have been assessed by the International Programme for Chemical Safety and the International Agency for Research on Cancer. These assessments have demonstrated that:

- 1. all types of asbestos cause asbestosis, mesothelioma and lung cancer;**
- 2. there is no safe threshold level of exposure;**
- 3. safer substitutes exist;**
- 4. exposure of workers and other users of asbestos containing products is extremely difficult to control; and**
- 5. asbestos abatement is very costly and hard to be carried out in a completely safe way.**

The primary purpose of this document is to integrate the conclusions of the risk assessments of asbestos carried out under the auspices of WHO, to outline the magnitude of the problem of asbestos-related diseases and to provide general recommendations for their elimination through regulatory, engineering and medical interventions.