



MEDIA STATEMENT



Hospice Week (3-10 May) Asbestos Trusts Call for Hospice Facilities

Hundreds of asbestos victims are dying in the Northern Cape and Limpopo without access to palliative treatment, hospice care or post-mortem facilities that could help to secure compensation for their families.

According to the Asbestos Relief Trust and the Kgalagadi Relief Trust, which have provided compensation of more than R387million to 4548 asbestos sufferers over the past 12 years, the majority of asbestos cancer sufferers in rural areas die a lonely and painful death because there are no palliative care or hospice services.

Many of these victims will have been asbestos miners but others are community members who have contracted asbestos related diseases because of long exposure to windblown asbestos fibres in the former asbestos mining areas.

The trusts sponsor a palliative care nurse operating out of Kuruman but she is only able to care for a small number of patients because of the enormous distances involved in the former asbestos mining areas.

According to the trusts, communities that still live in the heavily polluted "asbestos belt" from Prieska in the south to Pomfret in the north are lost to the state's health support system.

According to the trusts, the other major asbestos-related challenges faced by these communities include:

- High levels of asbestos pollution in houses/schools/roads/abandoned mines and dumps.
- Lack of community awareness of the dangers of asbestos exposure.
- Lack of hospice facilities for asbestos cancer sufferers and other cancer sufferers.
- Collapse of heart and lung removal services, which are essential for compensation claims.
- Inadequate and delayed statutory compensation/benefits for former asbestos miners residing in South Africa and in neighbouring labour sending countries.
- Lack of statutory compensation for environmentally exposed communities.

These issues have been addressed at two national asbestos conferences over the past 20 years.

The trusts recognise that comprehensive corrective action would be complex, time-consuming and expensive but they have called on all spheres of the government to give serious consideration and immediate priority to establishing a hospice facility in Kuruman funded by the Northern Cape Provincial Government.