

ASBESTOS MINING IN RUSSIA STILL FUELS THE ECONOMY IN SOME CITIES

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It is common in the small city of Asbest, Russia, for young-and-in-love newlyweds to have their photograph taken happily on an observation platform that offers a panoramic view of the world's largest open-pit asbestos mine, a backdrop seen as both picturesque and promising.

They look differently at asbestos there.

While [much of the world](#) either has banned or strongly regulated asbestos mining and use, Russia mostly has ignored the warnings, and the city of Asbest continues to embrace the industry

with a passion that borders on addiction.

According to the U.S. Geological Survey, more than 1 million tons of asbestos was mined in Russia in 2012, more than double the amount of any other country.

"As a representative of the industry, I don't see any problem," Vladimir Galitsyn, spokesman for the Russian Chrysotile Association, told the [The New York Times](#) in a recent story about the city and the country's asbestos relationship.

Russia Ignores the Danger

[Asbestos is a naturally occurring mineral](#) that was used extensively around the world through much of the 20th century. Its ability to fireproof, insulate and strengthen almost everything made asbestos especially valuable, leading to a myriad of uses.

Unfortunately, it also is toxic, leading to a variety of serious respiratory issues when the microscopic fibers are inhaled or ingested. Medical experts agree that it can lead to lung cancer, [asbestosis](#) and mesothelioma cancer.

More than 50 countries have banned its use. The United States and [Canada strictly regulate it](#). The mining of asbestos within the United States stopped in the '80s after health issues became more obvious, and product liability became so costly.

Consumption in the United States peaked at 800,000 tons in 1973. It was approximately 1,000 tons in 2012.

"They (Americans) consider it dangerous, but we consider it safe," said Galitsyn, who pointed to its fireproofing abilities for saving lives.

The last open-pit mine in Canada, which was located in Asbestos, Quebec, closed in 2011.

Asbestos Drives Economy in this City

The city of Asbest, Russia, population 70,000, continues to thrive with an economy fueled by the mining. *The Times* article estimated that 17 percent of Asbest residents work in either the asbestos mining industry or the factory that is owned by the same company operating the mine.

The asbestos industry employs 38,500 people throughout Russia. An estimated 400,000 depend on the mining and the related factories, according to the article. The Russian Chrysotile Association estimates that annual sales generate \$540 million in revenue.

Despite the repeated warnings of long-term health problems, the asbestos business is booming for Uralasbest, the mining company in Asbest. [Demand remains strong from India and China](#), which covet a cost-effective building material and fire retardant, while the supply from other countries has dwindled.

The mine in Asbest has been open since the late 1800s. The pit descends approximately 1,000 feet into the ground and spans the size of a small town. The city adopted a new flag a decade ago that includes thin white lines, symbolizing asbestos fibers, cutting through a ring of fire. The municipal anthem, when translated, is named "Asbestos, my city and my fate." There is a billboard near the mine today that reads, "Asbestos is Our Future."

The Times article chronicles residents who talk about the asbestos dust that often covers their homes when the wind shifts their way, touching vegetable gardens and clothes lines. They hear the daily blasts from the strip-mining process that sends the carcinogenic dust into the air.

The Times spoke with one former miner who suffers today from asbestosis and has trouble breathing. He sounded typical of many others.

"If we didn't have the (asbestos) factory, how would we live?" he told *The Times*. "We need to keep it open so we have jobs."

Australia Still Fighting Asbestos Battles

Even in countries that have banned asbestos in recent decades, it remains a lingering and [still-alarming problem](#). [Australia](#), for example, has seen the rollout of its much-anticipated National Broadband Network turn into a nightmare because of an asbestos scare.

Telstra Corporation Limited, the country's leading telecommunications and media company, stopped work preparing the existing underground pipes and pits that were expected to be part of the network when it was discovered that a significant percentage of them were contaminated by asbestos.

The National Broadband Network was expected to bring high-speed broadband service to almost every home and business in Australia during the next 10 years. That blueprint may be delayed by an additional \$50 million price tag for the necessary asbestos removal.

<http://www.asbestos.com/news/2013/07/16/asbestos-mining-russia-fuels-economy/#fbclomments>