



MEDIA STATEMENT

Appeal to Commemorate Global Asbestos Awareness Week in South Africa

Global Asbestos Awareness Week (1 April – 7 April 2014) works to raise awareness of asbestos-related diseases – including mesothelioma, asbestosis and lung cancer, as well as to advocate for the significant danger that asbestos exposure poses to the health of individuals and communities.

Even though mining of asbestos ended in South Africa in 2001, the country continues to deal with the reality of asbestos and its related diseases (ARDs). This ranges from issues faced by organisations like Transnet as to how and where to safely dispose of asbestos stockpiles through to the decision of the Gauteng government to replace all asbestos roofs in the province. Likewise, the Asbestos Relief Trust continues to see cases of asbestos-related diseases – 13 years after mining stopped in South Africa.

The fact of the matter is that the nature of the disease means that individuals exposed to asbestos are still being diagnosed with ARDs. In addition, communities that were based in asbestos mining areas continue to suffer the legacy of possible current exposure to asbestos.

In expressing our support for this initiative, the Asbestos Relief Trust hopes that it will raise awareness about the prevention of asbestos-related diseases and caution communities in previous mining areas to be vigilant in avoiding asbestos exposure. The legacy of asbestos mining in South Africa has not been resolved and is proving a long and often, bitter journey. In the interim, it is only greater education that can prevent communities unduly exposing themselves to asbestos. Further, on an international scale, there are still countries where asbestos-mining remains legal and the battle against asbestos mining where it takes place continues.

The World Health Organization reported “in 2004 that asbestos-related lung cancer, mesothelioma and asbestosis from occupational exposures resulted in [107,000 deaths and 1,523,000 DALYs](#). DALY’s are a disability-adjusted life year and is the measure of overall disease burden in terms of the number of years lost due to ill-health, disability or early death. But as Linda Reinstein, an American widow whose husband died from asbestos-related diseases and head of the Asbestos Disease Awareness Organisation, an asbestos victims and lobby group, says: these aren’t just numbers; these are individuals, families and friends who have been impacted by preventable deadly diseases.

The Asbestos Relief Trust, which has had to compensate people suffering from some of the worst cases of mesothelioma, appeals to all key stakeholders in South Africa to take up this cause and support Global Asbestos Awareness Week – using the opportunity to raise the visibility of the disease through advocacy initiatives and to work in affected communities through education initiatives. For further information, visit: www.asbestostrust.co.za.