

India's contentious stand on Chrysotile asbestos is a cause for concern for environmentalists

A delegation from India is currently in Geneva to negotiate key treaties regulating the trade in hazardous materials, including chemicals and waste.

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<http://www.hindustantimes.com/health/india-s-contentious-stand-on-chrysotile-asbestos-is-a-cause-for-concern-for-environmentalists/story-k6iM84vsZ00mhlV0Brn1ML.html>



Chrysotile asbestos has been banned in many parts of the world for being carcinogenic but is not listed as a hazardous substance under the Rotterdam Convention that regulates trade in harmful substances. (HT File)

An Indian delegation led by environment secretary Ajay Narayan Jha is in Geneva to negotiate some of the most important environmental treaties dealing with trade in hazardous chemicals and waste.

Environmentalists are paying close attention to India's stand on Chrysotile asbestos, a substance that has been banned in many parts of the world for being carcinogenic but is not listed as a hazardous substance under the Rotterdam Convention that regulates trade in hazardous substances.

"Chrysotile asbestos should be listed as a hazardous substance under the Rotterdam Convention," said Gopal Krishna of Toxics Watch Alliance, an India-based non-governmental organisation, adding, "all it does is places the onus on

exporters of the material to another country to obtain prior informed consent (PIC).”

India’s stand on the listing of the substance has been far from consistent. In 2011, the Indian delegation came out in favour of including it in the list, receiving a standing ovation for taking the stand. At the next convention in 2013, India reversed its stand based on a study by the National Institute of Occupational Health, that has been widely discredited.

This ambiguity has persisted with the government’s statements not lining up with its actions. Last year, the environment minister for state Anil Madhav Dave said they were looking for alternatives to asbestos while maintaining that there were no studies from India linking Chrysotile asbestos to health impacts.

“Since the use of asbestos is affecting human health, its use should gradually be minimised and eventually end. As far as I know, its use is declining. But it must end,” Dave said.

The largest Chrysotile producing and exporting countries have blocked proposals to have it included in the hazardous substances list. In the last Rotterdam Conference of Parties in 2015 eight countries opposed such a move: Russia, Kazakhstan, India, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Cuba, and Zimbabwe. Russia is the largest asbestos producer, while India is the biggest importer of the substance.

The PIC mechanism allows countries to which a substance is being exported to have a say in whether they wish to allow future shipments of the hazardous substances. Currently, 47 chemicals are listed in Annex III of the Rotterdam Convention, of which 33 are pesticides and 14 industrial chemicals, are subject to this requirement.

Chrysotile asbestos is a variant of asbestos that industry representatives claim is not as hazardous to human health as other forms of Asbestos. It is predominantly used in asbestos cement building materials, which are used mostly in developing countries.

Over 50 countries including European Union, Japan and Australia have banned the use of Asbestos altogether.

It may be less harmful but it is far from benign, according to the World Health Organisation. “Asbestos (actinolite, amosite, anthophyllite, chrysotile, crocidolite and tremolite) has been classified by the International Agency for Research on Cancer as being carcinogenic to humans,” a 2014 [WHO report](#) said.