



## SECRETARIAT OF THE PACIFIC REGIONAL ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME

Twenty-Second SPREP Meeting

Apia, Samoa

13 – 15 September 2011

**Agenda Item 8.2.8:****Draft Regional Asbestos Strategy****Purpose**

1. To seek endorsement of the draft Regional Asbestos Strategy and Action Plan 2011-2015 (*An Asbestos Free Pacific: A Regional Strategy and Action Plan, 2011*).

**Background**

2. The management and disposal of asbestos containing materials are currently a cause of concern in the Pacific region. Although asbestos containing materials are now banned and no longer produced in many countries, they may still be found in public and domestic buildings in the region.
3. In the Pacific region, the main product encountered is asbestos cement sheeting which is not a threat to health as long as it remains undamaged. However, as buildings age or become damaged (for example by extreme weather events such as tsunamis and cyclones), they can release dangerous asbestos fibres to the environment. When inhaled these fibres can lead to a number of diseases including deadly asbestosis, mesothelioma and lung cancer.
4. Similarly, during building demolition or renovation, disturbance and breakage of asbestos containing products are likely to liberate asbestos fibres and workplace health and safety procedures need to be in place to protect exposed workers from inhaling airborne fibres.
5. In order to protect Pacific communities from exposure to airborne asbestos fibres and work towards an asbestos-free Pacific, we need to be careful to protect all individuals who will be exposed to potential risk, be they residents, workers in the building and waste disposal industries, or disaster response personnel.
6. The best means of protection may be a combination of initial stabilization of asbestos containing materials to minimize or prevent further release of fibres, followed by eventual removal and disposal.

**1. Regional Asbestos Strategy**

7. The 21<sup>st</sup> SPREP Meeting in 2010 placed a priority in the improvement of asbestos management in the Pacific. The meeting directed the Secretariat to developing a regional strategy to better manage and dispose of asbestos containing materials.

8. This regional asbestos waste management strategy includes:
- Provision of background information on the health risks associated with asbestos exposure;
  - Provision of guidance on best practice in asbestos handling and disposal options;
  - Description of an integrated framework to progressively assess, stabilize, collect and dispose of asbestos containing materials in the Pacific;
  - Presentation of a draft of model national asbestos management policy for further discussion and consultation prior to national adoption; and
  - Support for co-ordination and capacity building in hazardous waste management.
- Assistance will be provided by the Secretariat to island states for asbestos related activities including acquisition of funding, technical assistance and other relevant work.
9. The draft strategy and action plan was circulated to Members for comment and review on the 16<sup>th</sup> May 2011.
10. No comments were received from any Member country (except New Zealand) on the draft strategy.

## 2. Asbestos Action Plan 2011-2015

11. The Asbestos Strategy is supported by an Action Plan (2011-2015) which presents a five year timeframe and framework in which to improve regional asbestos management.
12. The asbestos action plan includes a time-bound framework for:
- Completion of national asbestos policies including asbestos disposal options;
  - Development of Standardised Operating Procedures (SOPS) for asbestos handling and removal, including contingency planning for future natural disasters;
  - Completion of national asbestos distribution surveys; and
  - Prioritised regional/national asbestos stabilisation, and removal and disposal as necessary.

## Recommendations

13. The Meeting is invited to:
- **endorse** the Regional Asbestos Strategy and Action Plan (*An Asbestos Free Pacific: A Regional Strategy and Action Plan, 2011*);
  - **call** on partners and donor agencies to provide assistance where possible to ensure completion of the action plan;
  - **note** the involvement of the World Health Organization in development of the Strategy and Action Plan; and
  - **direct** the Secretariat to provide assistance to Members in the implementation of the Strategy and Action Plan where possible

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18 July 2011