



PO Box 240, Apia, Samoa
 E: sprep@sprep.org
 T: +685 21929
 F: +685 20231
 W: www.sprep.org

The Pacific environment, sustaining our livelihoods and natural heritage in harmony with our cultures.



Twenty Seventh SPREP Meeting of Officials

Alofi, Niue

19 – 21 September 2016

Agenda Item 9.3.4: Asbestos in the Pacific

Purpose

1. To seek the Meeting's endorsement of a Pacific-wide ban on asbestos imports and the resale/reuse of existing asbestos materials.

Background

2. Asbestos is a naturally occurring rock fibre that it is harmful to humans. When products containing asbestos are damaged or wear down over time, small fibres are released and become airborne. Breathing in asbestos fibres can cause a range of diseases including cancer. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that globally, more than 100,000 people die each year from illnesses related to asbestos exposure.
3. *An Asbestos Free Pacific – A Regional Strategy and Action Plan* was adopted at the 22nd SPREP Meeting (Samoa) in 2011. The strategy was co-sponsored by SPREP and WHO. This strategy outlined the serious potential health risks that asbestos materials and wastes pose in the Pacific.
4. This strategy paved the way for taking action on existing asbestos materials and wastes (primarily building materials) in the Pacific, through the 7.85 million euro, European Union-funded and SPREP-administered Pacific Hazardous Waste Management project (PacWaste).
5. In 2013/14 the PacWaste project conducted the Pacific's first Regional Asbestos Baseline Survey across 26 islands in 13 Pacific island countries. The survey found:
 - a. widespread asbestos in seven Pacific island countries in public, commercial and residential buildings;
 - b. asbestos materials being reused and resold in several locations (Nauru, Samoa, FSM, RMI, Niue); and
 - c. 'new asbestos' sheeting materials for sale at hardware stores in the Solomon Islands (Gizo) and in Vanuatu (Luganville).
6. The results from the Regional Asbestos Baseline Survey concluded that more than USD 150 million would be needed to remove/replace all the asbestos identified in the locations surveyed and that new asbestos materials are now being imported into the Pacific region primarily from Asia. Recent studies in Australia and New Zealand also confirm widespread import of asbestos containing products coming into those countries as well.

7. The WHO and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) have advised that the only way to eliminate asbestos related diseases is to stop the use of all types of asbestos. Currently the International Ban Asbestos Secretariat (IBAS) identifies 57 countries that have enacted a national asbestos ban to achieve this goal. On 1 October, 2016, New Zealand will become the 58th country to enact an asbestos ban, following their own investigations on 'new asbestos' in imports.
8. Currently, no Pacific island countries or territories have enacted a ban on asbestos imports though some (ie Fiji) have certain restrictions through Ministry of Labour, industrial relation and employment. There are also little if any controls on reusing or reselling existing asbestos that can be collected and sold as second hand building materials.
9. The current situation is that asbestos materials can continue to be lawfully imported and used in Pacific island countries and territories. This hampers both the original goal of Regional Asbestos Strategy to achieve an 'Asbestos Free Pacific' and asbestos removal projects such as PacWaste which will expend USD 2.5 million in 2016/2017 in an effort to reduce the total quantities of asbestos in contact with the population.
10. While efforts are underway to reduce asbestos stockpiles and dispose of it correctly, further action is needed at the regional and national level to prevent new asbestos coming into the region and to prevent existing asbestos from being reused. A Pacific-wide ban on asbestos imports, similar to those enacted in Australia and New Zealand, along with changes in national legislation to ensure existing asbestos containing materials cannot be reused, would help us towards achieving our goal of an asbestos-free Pacific.

Recommendations

11. The Meeting is invited to:
 - **note** the 'State of the Asbestos in the Pacific' synthesis report produced under the PacWaste project which summarises the findings of the project's Regional Asbestos Baseline Survey;
 - **endorse** a Pacific-wide ban on asbestos imports; and
 - **direct the Secretariat** to progress a Pacific-wide ban on asbestos imports through Cleaner Pacific 2025 and related project envelopes.

Annex 1: PacWaste's *The State of Asbestos in the Pacific* synthesis report