

# Letter to the Editor

Thank you for your recent asbestos-themed issue.<sup>1</sup> Asbestos will, unfortunately, remain a concern in our lifetimes because 1) millions of tons of asbestos were mined worldwide;<sup>2</sup> 2) it was widely introduced into our environments over several decades;<sup>2</sup> 3) asbestos does not rot;<sup>3</sup> 4) it is mutagenic with evidence suggesting no minimal threshold dose;<sup>4</sup> 5) there is growing evidence that the newest wave of mesothelioma incidence is being driven by exposure to environmental asbestos;<sup>5</sup> 6) the incidence of asbestos-related mortality is increasing;<sup>6</sup> and 7) the latency period between first exposure and mesothelioma is considerable.<sup>7</sup>

Historically and currently, asbestos has proven to be the most toxic or pathogenic of all occupational carcinogens, accounting for 255 000 deaths worldwide, annually (98.6% of which are cancer deaths), with 37 000 being due to mesothelioma.<sup>6</sup> Unless more countries impose a total ban on asbestos, this number will continue to rise. Currently, 66 countries have banned asbestos, with South Africa and Brazil being part of that group.<sup>8</sup>



**US President Trump has endorsed products of Russia's Uralasbest, one of the world's largest asbestos producers** Photograph: [https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/russian-asbestos-trump\\_face/](https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/russian-asbestos-trump_face/) (Accessed 24 Oct 2018)

However, there have been a number of recent and worrying international developments:

1. Donald Trump has endorsed asbestos. He has allowed his image to be used by Uralasbest, one of the world's largest asbestos producers, with the words 'Approved by Donald Trump, 45th President of the United States' emblazoned on their products.<sup>9</sup>
2. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has mooted new uses for asbestos. Significant New Use Rules (SNURs) on asbestos have been proposed by the United States of America's EPA, along with six other proven carcinogens.<sup>10</sup> This is extremely disturbing as jurisdictions in the developing world may incorrectly interpret the EPA's actions as signalling that asbestos is safe. These proposals also indicate that a ban by the USA is unlikely in the foreseeable future.
3. Canada has introduced only a partial ban. Under their Prohibition of Asbestos and Products Containing Asbestos Regulations, Canada will introduce a qualified ban by the end of 2018.<sup>11</sup> However, the government has allowed the chlor-alkali industry to continue using asbestos until 2030, despite there being viable alternatives, and it has also financially supported the re-mining of asbestos tailings dumps for certain valuable elements, such as magnesium.<sup>12</sup>

Given these latest developments, a worldwide ban and a decrease in asbestos-related morbidity and mortality seem to be many years away. In order to raise public awareness of these unacceptable dangers, I suggest we start referring to asbestos as *asbestox*.

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