

## South Africa Bans All Use of Asbestos

Environmental Affairs and Tourism Minister Marthinus van Schalkwyk has announced that the use, manufacture and processing of asbestos will be prohibited in South Africa with immediate effect.

The Regulations for the Prohibition of the Use, Manufacturing, Import and Export of Asbestos and Asbestos Containing Materials, which form part of the Environment Conservation Act of 1989, will be promulgated on 28 March and will take effect immediately, Van Schalkwyk said at a media briefing on Thursday.

"A grace period of 120 days will be allowed for any person or merchant who is currently dealing in asbestos or asbestos containing materials to clear their stocks," he said.

The main objectives of the new regulations is to prohibit the use, processing or manufacturing, of any asbestos or asbestos-containing product unless it can be proven that no suitable alternative exists.

South Africa will now prohibit the import or export of any asbestos or asbestos-containing product, and will also stop the import of any asbestos or asbestos containing waste material other than from a member of the Southern African Development Community.

The regulations do, however, make provision for asbestos to be used for research purposes.

### Health implications

The health implications of exposure to airborne asbestos fibres were highlighted in the 1930s and specific links to certain cancers were first made in South Africa in the early 1960s.

"Due to the extent and severity of asbestos related problems affecting the communities in these provinces, a multi-stakeholder National Asbestos Summit was convened by the Environmental Portfolio Committee in 1998," Van Schalkwyk said.

He highlighted that recommendations from the summit brought about the development of a national strategy to address asbestos pollution in the country with the objective of phasing out the mining of it out.

The department had been mandated by Cabinet to draft regulations to enforce the phasing out and ultimate prohibition of asbestos, with the first draft regulations being published in 2005.

#### Asbestos register

Van Schalkwyk said it is important to remember that exposure to asbestos in the workplace including, mining, industrial, commercial, retail and public workplaces, including maintenance of building materials is still controlled by the Asbestos Regulations 2001 published by the Department of Labour.

These require employers to draw up a register of all asbestos containing materials, conduct a risk assessment, educate and inform employees, protect employees from exposure to asbestos and conduct regular dust and health surveillance.

South Africa, he said, has joined some 50 countries in the prohibition of asbestos and that any person who has ever suffered from exposure to asbestos would see the absolute necessity for the regulations.

Asbestos once accounted for three percent of the value of South Africa's minerals. South Africa was previously the fifth largest supplier of chrysotile, produced 97% of the world's crocidolite and 100% of all amosite.