



04 May 2015 – At a high-level meeting on environment and health in Europe – held April 28-30 in Haifa, Israel – a new [World Health Organization](#) (WHO) report was released, highlighting that one third of the 900 million people living in the region are potentially exposed to asbestos at work and in the environment.

"We cannot afford losing almost 15,000 lives a year in Europe, especially workers, from diseases caused by exposure to asbestos. Every death from asbestos-related diseases is avoidable," says Dr Zsuzsanna Jakab, the WHO Regional Director for Europe.

The status of asbestos exposure in WHO's European Region

About one third of the 900 million people in the WHO European Region live in countries that have not yet banned the use of all forms of asbestos. This potentially exposes them at work and

in the environment.

The 15 countries that have not yet banned all forms of asbestos are: Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Republic of Moldova, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan.

These countries continue to use asbestos, especially for building materials, and some continue to produce and export it. Even after its use has ceased, asbestos lingers in the environment, so it needs to be safely removed and disposed without delay.

An 'eye-opener' new report released

At the meeting in Haifa, the report [Progress toward the elimination of asbestos-related diseases](#) was presented. It assesses current policies in member states, based on a survey conducted in 2014.

It indicates that asbestos, a group of natural fibrous minerals, is responsible for about half of all deaths from cancers developed at work. According to new estimates, deaths from mesothelioma* in 15 European countries cost society more than 1.5 billion euros annually.

The report states that all forms of asbestos should be considered as silent killers as health disorders may appear several decades after an exposure, even after only a short exposure time. Both the WHO and the [International Labour Organization](#) (ILO) recommend that all forms of asbestos should be banned in order to eliminate asbestos-related diseases.

During a conference in Geneva, held from May 4-15, the [Chemical Review Committee of the Rotterdam Convention](#) will consider [listing chrysotile or white asbestos](#), the most common form of asbestos, among the substances for which importing countries have to give their consent to the exporting party for the trade to occur.

More information

To discover more about the progress towards the elimination of asbestos-related diseases, [read the report](#)

Do you want to know the cost of mesothelioma cases in your country? Find out [here](#) .

For additional information on asbestos, [consult the following page](#) .

* = Mesothelioma is a rare form of cancer of the protective lining that covers many of the internal organs of the body. Some 85–90% of male mesothelioma cases are due to occupational asbestos exposure.