Statement of scientists on the ‘scientific’ study by National Institute of Occupational Health (India) titled ‘Study of Health Hazards / Environmental hazards resulting from use of Chrysotile variety of Asbestos in the country’

21 - March 2015

Background

In 2004, the Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilisers, Government of India, commissioned the National Institute of Occupational Health (NIOH), a premier research institute under the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), to conduct a study titled Study of Health Hazards / Environment Hazards resulting from use of Chrysotile Variety of Asbestos in the country.

The study was commissioned in the light of the proposed inclusion of Chrysotile in the Prior Informed Consent (PIC) list of the Rotterdam Convention, which was recommended for listing twice by the Chemical Review Committee of the Convention in 2005 and 2006. The Government of India’s decision to base its position on science is indeed a laudable one. However, there have been serious methodological flaws in the way the study was designed, conducted, ‘reviewed’ and interpreted as has been pointed out since 2008 by public health scientists, Indian national trade unions and health activists.

Critique of the NIOH study

In his detailed comments on the draft NIOH study in 2008 Dr Richard A. Lemen, Assistant Surgeon General, United Stated Public Health Service (retd.) wrote:

“Overall, a reading of this study by the untrained reader would seem to support the safety of using Chrysotile asbestos. However, the “Study of Health hazards/ Environmental hazards resulting from use of the Chrysotile variety of Asbestos in the country” can never be used or relied upon to support the safety of Chrysotile asbestos. This is because the cross-sectional nature of an active workforce having insufficient latency eliminates its ability to detect asbestos-related diseases of long latency while the environmental sampling methodology underestimates the true exposures to Chrysotile asbestos within the studied industry sectors. In other words, such a study is a deception, which the illusionist will use to whitewash the effects of chrysotile asbestos.”

Dr Benedetto Terracini, Professor of Cancer Epidemiology (retired), University of Torino, Italy had commented:

2 Between the months of March-April 2008, letters were sent to Shri Ram Vilas Paswan, the then union Minister of Chemicals and Fertilizer by Indian and international public health scientists, pointing out the flaws and misinterpretation of results by NIOH.
“Authors of the report have not indicated and there is no description of their criteria for evaluating and inferring from their literature survey. For instance, on what basis do they state that “… the possibility of safe use of chrysotile asbestos … happens to be an unresolved issue”? Incidentally, many asbestos experts would not endorse such statement”.

Dr Arthur Frank, Professor and Chair, Department of Environmental and Occupational Health, Drexel University, School of Public Health, Philadelphia, USA wrote of the study:

“Almost without exception, the studies, as written, have significant flaws and represent a lack of proper understanding of the development of asbestos related disease. For example, age should never be used as a parameter, rather than years of employment, and better yet, the best measure to use is years from first employment with disease not expected to be prevalent much before 20 years or longer. Anything shorter than that will, either purposefully, or accidentally, mischaracterize the development of disease.”

In 2008, official delegates to COP 4 of Rotterdam Convention from government of India had informed the international community about the ‘ongoing’ NIOH study and that the Indian government will await the results of the study before it decides on its position. However, in COP 5 of 2010, Government of India (GOI) decided to go ahead and support the listing of Chrysotile asbestos in the PIC list. In COP 6 held in 2013, the GOI came back with the ‘final’ NIOH study to ‘claim’ that there was “no” health problem associated with Chrysotile asbestos use in India and therefore India was not going to support the listing anymore.

On reading the ‘final’ NIOH study (2013), Dr Terracini commented:

“This report describes several cross sectional studies on active workers in asbestos working plants (and one on the general population living around an asbestos plant). This study design does not allow for any estimate of the occurrence of chronic (frequently lethal) conditions known to be caused by asbestos exposure, which require a latent period of many years. The incidence/mortality of such conditions cannot be estimated among active workers. It would require data on all workers who have been active in each plant, over the last (say, at least) 30 years. after onset of exposure. Thus, this report cannot be used for claiming "harmlessness" of asbestos used in India”

"In addition, in the revision of the literature, the report omits to mention findings regarding the carcinogenicity of Chrysotile, which have led the International Agency of Cancer of the World Health Organization to describe Chrysotile as a carcinogen for the human species”

The criteria for selection of workers for the study expose a deliberate attempt by NIOH to ‘not’ find cases of asbestos related illnesses. For instance, no retired workers were selected for the study or some workers who had worked only for 5 years were chosen for the study. In one factory, the mean age of workers was 27.4 ± 6.5 (range 18-45 years). 71% were up to 30 years of age. Mean job duration was 4.5 ± 3.2 years. Minimum experience was 1 year and majority had experience of work up to 5 years.
While there is no systematic monitoring and reporting of asbestos related diseases (ARD) in India, even then 225 cases of mesothelioma, a rare form of cancer found in people exposed to all forms of asbestos fibres, have been reported by the Indian cancer registry, the Gujarat Cancer Institute and the Tata Cancer Institute. Independent studies in Mumbai, Madhya Pradesh and Jharkhand of former asbestos product manufacturing factory/mine workers have identified over 800 cases of asbestosis, most of whom have also been compensated for contracting ARD due to work related exposure. New data being collected by independent health organisations show diseases amongst family members of workers due to secondary and environmental exposures. Several legal cases are pending in labour and civil courts in Gujarat, Maharashtra and Rajasthan.

**We state**

We would like to strongly state that the ‘claim’ being made by the government of India regarding the ‘safety’ of Chrysotile asbestos is **unacceptable** to any credible scientists or scientific community. The world scientific community has overwhelmingly concluded that Chrysotile asbestos causes deadly diseases, such as asbestosis, mesothelioma and lung and other cancers, and that it cannot be safely used.

The International Agency for Research on Cancer and the World Health Organization have called for an end to all use of Chrysotile asbestos in order to prevent further tragic epidemics of asbestos-related diseases.

To name just a few leading organisations, the World Federation of Public Health Associations, the International Commission on Occupational Health, the International Social Security Association, the Union for International Cancer Control (representing 770 member organisations in 155 countries, including the Indian Cancer Society and the Cancer Aid and Research Foundation of India), the International Trade Union Confederation (representing 175 million workers in 151 countries), the Collegium Ramazzini, the Joint Policy Committee of Societies of Epidemiology and the Indian Association of Occupational Health have all called for an end to the use of Chrysotile asbestos.

We therefore request Government of India to withdraw the NIOH study, which does not hold up to any credible scientific scrutiny and do the right thing by supporting the listing of Chrysotile asbestos in the PIC list in the upcoming COP 7 in May 2015, so that the trading countries have a prior knowledge about the health implications of Chrysotile asbestos before importing it.

Sincerely,

**For more information, contact:**

Dr. Abhijeet Jadhav, Mumbai, India. Phone: 09820311681; email: abhijeetjadhav1234@gmail.com

Dr. Philip J. Landrigan, New York, USA. Phone: 1-212-824-7018; email: phil.landrigan@mssm.edu;
SIGNERS

ORGANISATIONS (by alphabetical order)

All India Peoples Science Network, federation of 41 "Peoples Science Movement", India. President: D. Raghunandan.

Brazilian Association of Public Health (Associação Brasileira de Saúde Coletiva), ABRASCO, Brazil, http://www.abrasco.org.br. President: Dr. Luis Eugenio de Souza.


Centre for Occupational & Environmental Health Research (COEHR), School of Public Health & Family Medicine, Health Sciences Faculty, University of Cape Town, South Africa. Director: Dr. Mohamed Aqiel Dalvie.


Delhi Science Forum (Organisation of science workers in different institutions, schools and university in Delhi), Delhi, India, www.delhiscienceforum.net. Secretary: Dr. Kamala Menon.

International Joint Policy Committee of the Societies of Epidemiology (IJPC-SE), www.ijpc-se.org. President, Dr. Colin L. Soskolne.

International Mesothelioma Interest Group (iMIG), http://imig.org/. President: Dr. Dean Fennell.


Italian Association of Doctors for the Environment (Associazione Medici per l'Ambiente), ISDE, Italy, www.isde.it. President: Dr. Roberto Romizi.


Prayas Health Group, Amrita Clinic, Pune, India. Coordinator: Vinay Kulkarni, MBBS, MD,FAMS,DNB,AAHIVS

Research and Training Centre for Community Development (RTCCD), Vietnam, www.rtccd.org.vn. Director: Dr. Tran Tuan.

Sciencecorps, Lexington, MA, USA, www.sciencecorps.org. Director: Dr. Kathleen Burns, Ph.D.

**INDIVIDUALS (by alphabetical order)**

**NOTE: Titles and affiliations are given for identification purposes only.**

Prof. Sanghmitra S. Acharya, Professor, Centre of Social Medicine and Community Health, School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi India

Dr. Guadalupe Aguilar Madrid, MD, PhD, Center for Research and Counseling Association (CILAS), Member of the National System of Researchers CONACYT, Professor of the Faculty of Medicine, UNAM, México

Dr. Wael Al-Delaimy MD, PhD, Professor and Chief, Division of Global Health, Department of Family Medicine and Public Health, University of California, San Diego, USA

Dr. Dileep Andhare, Occupational Health Consultant, Navi Mumbai, Maharashtra, India

Prof. Dr. med. Xaver Baur, Institute for Occupational Medicine, Charité University Medicine Berlin, Germany

Dr. Micheline Beaudry, Ph.D., professeure retraitée de nutrition publique, Université Laval, Québec; Responsable de la Commission santé, conditions de vie et services sociaux, Québec solidaire, 2008 à 2012, Québec, Canada

Dr. Yv Bonnier Viger, Director, Department of Social and Preventive Medicine, Faculty of Medicine, Laval University; President, Association of Physicians specializing in Community Health, Québec; President, Centre for International Cooperation in Health and Development (CCISD), Québec, Canada

Dr. David Bowering MD. MHSc., Chief Medical Health Officer (ret), Northern Health, British Columbia, Canada

Dr. James Brophy, PhD, Visiting Research Fellow, University of Stirling, Scotland; former Executive Director, Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers, Canada

Dr. Arindam Basu, MBBS, MPH. PhD, Senior Lecturer; Senior Researcher, Health Services Assessment Collaboration, University of Canterbury School of Health Sciences, Christchurch, New Zealand; former Associate Director Fogarty International Training Program in Environmental and Occupational Health, Kolkata, India.
Dr. Prof. Lygia Therese Budnik, PhD, Professor for Occupational Toxicology and Immunology, University of Hamburg, Germany; European Society for Environmental and Occupational Medicine

Dr. Barry Castleman, ScD, Environmental Consultant; Fellow, Collegium Ramazzini, Italy; author, *Asbestos: Medical and Legal Aspects*, USA

Dr. Prabir Chatterjee, MD (Community Medicine), Public Health Doctor, Calcutta, India

Dr. Sanjay Chaturvedi MD, FAMS, FIPHA, FIAPSM, Professor and Head, Department of Community Medicine, University College of Medical Sciences, Delhi, India

Dr. Elisabetta Chellini, MD, Associate Professor of Public Health; Head, Unit of Occupational & Environmental Epidemiology, Cancer Research & Prevention Institute (ISPO), Florence, Italy

Dr. Paolo Crosignani, former head of the National Cancer Institute Environmental Epidemiology Unit, Italy

Dr. Paul A. Demers, Ph.D., Director, Occupational Cancer Research Centre, Cancer Care Ontario, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Prof. Luis Eugenio de Souza, Federal University of Bahia, Brazil

Dr. Pierre Deshaies, MD, MSc, CSPQ, FRCP, Professeur de clinique, Département de médecine sociale et préventive, Faculté de médecine, Université Laval, Québec, Canada

Dr. Arthur L. Frank, MD, PhD, Professor of Public Health, Drexel University School of Public Health, Philadelphia, PA, USA. Fellow, Collegium Ramazzini, Italy.

Dr. Erica Frank, MD, MPH, Professor and Canada Research Chair in Preventive Medicine and Population Health, University of British Columbia, Canada; Founder and President, NextGenU.org

Professor Bice Fubini, Department of Chemistry, Head of "G.Scansetti" Inter-departmental Center for Studies on Asbestos and other Toxic Particulates, University of Torino, Italy.

Dr. Thomas H. Gassert, MD, MSc, Assistant Professor of Medicine, University of Massachusetts Medical School, USA; Visiting Scientist, Occupational & Environmental Medicine, Harvard School of Public Health, USA

Dr. James A. Gaudino, Jr., MD, MPH, MS, FACPM, Senior Health Consultant and Medical Epidemiologist; Affiliate Associate Professor, Department of Public Health and Preventive Medicine, Schools of Medicine and Public Health Initiative, Oregon Health & Sciences University; Past Chair, Epidemiology Section, American Public Health Association (APHA); Past
Chair and Co-Founder, Epidemiology and Biostatistics Section, Oregon Public Health Association, USA

Dr. Michael Gochfeld, MD, PhD, Adjunct Clinical Professor, Environmental and Occupational Medicine, Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School, Piscataway, New Jersey, USA

Dr. Pierre Gosselin, MD, MPH, Head, WHO-PAHO Collaborating Center on Environmental and Occupational Health Impact Assessment and Surveillance (INSPQCHUQ-DSP Québec), Québec, Canada

Perry Gottesfeld, MPH, Executive Director, Occupational Knowledge International, San Francisco, CA, USA

Dr. James Huff, PhD, Guest Researcher, formerly Associate Director for Chemical Carcinogenesis, National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, North Carolina, USA

Dr. Peter F. Infante, D.D.S., Dr.P.H., Peter F Infante Consulting, LLC, Falls Church, Virginia, USA

Dr. Abhijeet Jadhav, Assistant professor, JTCDM, School of Habitat, Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), Deonar, Mumbai, India

Dr. Margaret Keith, PhD, Visiting Research Fellow, University of Stirling, Scotland; former Research Coordinator, Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers, ON, Canada

Prof Mohamed F. Jeebhay, MBChB, MPH (Occ Med), PhD, Head of Department and Director, School of Public Health and Family Medicine, Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Cape Town, South Africa

Dr. Cuauhtémoc Arturo Juárez Pérez, Medical researcher in Environmental and Occupational Health, National System of Researchers in Mexico; University Professor, Faculty of Medicine, National Autonomous University of Mexico.

Dr. John R. Keyserlingk, MD, MSC, FRCS(C), FACS, Medical Director, Surgical Oncologist, VM Medica l, Montréal, Québec, Canada

Dr. Philip J. Landrigan, MD, MSc, President, Collegium Ramazzini; Ethel H. Wise Professor of Community Medicine; Chairman, Department of Preventive Medicine; Dean for Global Health. Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, New York, USA

Dr. Bruce P. Lanphear, MD, MPH, Clinician Scientist, Child & Family Research Institute, BC Children's Hospital; Professor, Faculty of Health Sciences, Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, BC, Canada

Dr. Abby Lippman, PhD, Professor Emerita, Department of Epidemiology, Biostatistics, and Occupational Health, McGill University, Montréal, Québec, Canada
Professor Leslie London, Director: School of Public Health and Family Medicine, University of Cape Town Health Sciences Faculty, South Africa

Dr. Alessandro Marinaccio, epidemiologist, INAIL, Italian workers’ compensation authority, Department of Occupational and Environmental Medicine, Epidemiology and Hygiene, Unit of Occupational and Environmental Epidemiology, Rome, Italy

Dr.ssa Daniela Marsili, Istituto Superiore di Sanità, Rome, Italy

Dr. Giuseppe Matullo, Associate Professor of Human Genetics, Department of Medical Sciences, University of Turin, and Human Genetics Foundation (HuGeF), Italy

Dr. Ramin Mehrdad, MD, MPH, Associate Professor of Occupational Medicine, Center for Research of Occupational Diseases, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran. Iran

Dr. Dario Mirabelli, MD, Epidemiologist, Cancer Epidemiology Unit, Città della Salute e della Scienza Hospital, Turin, Italy

Dr. Ashish Mittal, MBBS, AIHI, DHMM, MBA, LLB, CEO, OHS-MCS, Faridabad, Haryana, India

Dr. K.S. Mohindra, PhD, Senior Research Associate, Globalization/Health Equity Unit, University of Ottawa, Ottawa, Canada

Dr. Celeste Monforton, DrPH, MPH, Professorial Lecturer, Milken Institute, School of Public Health, George Washington University, Washington, DC, USA

Dr. Prof. David C. F. Muir, PhD, FRCP (London and Canada.), McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada.

Dr. V. Murlidhar, MS, M.Sc, Lecturer, Occupational and Environmental Medicine, National Institute of Epidemiology, ICMR, Chennai, India. Lecturer, Neuroscience, Madras University, International Faculty, CME training, UIC, Illinois, USA

Dr. Rama C. Nair, BSc, MStat, MSc, PhD, FACE, Vice-Dean Professional Affairs; Professor, Epidemiology and Community Medicine, Faculty of Medicine, University of Ottawa, Canada

Dr Éric Notebaert, MD, Associate Professor of Medicine, Université de Montréal, Québec, Canada

Dr. David Ozonoff, MD, MPH, Professor of Environmental Health, Boston University School of Public Health, Boston, USA

Dr. Domyung Paek, MD, MSc, ScD, Professor, Occupational and Environmental Medicine, School of Public Health, Seoul National University, Seoul, Korea
Dr. Smita Pakhalé, MD, FRCPC, MSc (Epi & Biostat), Associate Scientist, Ottawa Hospital Research Institute; Assistant Professor, University of Ottawa; Staff Respirologist, Division of Respiratory Medicine, The Ottawa Hospital, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

Dr. Harshil Parekh, MB, BS, D’Ortho, Hand Surgeon, Fellowship in Hand surgery and Microvascular Reconstruction, Ganga Hospital-Coimbatore; Restore Hand Clinic, Rajkot, India

Jagdish Patel, Dip.Chem Eng, Dip. Industrial Safety, Director, People’s Training & Research Centre, Vadodara, India

Dr. Anant Phadke, Senior Advisor, SATHI –CEHAT; Co-convenor, Jan Aarogy Abhiyaan, Maharashtra, Pune, India

Dr. Shyam Pingle, MBBS, MD, Occupational Health Physician; Past President, Indian Association of Occupational Health, Bangalore, India

Dr. Sadhana Prasad, BSc, MD, FRCP(C), FACP, Internal Medicine/ Specialized Geriatrics, Associate Clinical Professor of Medicine, McMaster University; Queen’s Diamond Jubilee Medal Recipient 2012; College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario Council Award for Outstanding Physician 2014, St. Mary’s General Hospital, Kitchener, Ontario, Canada

Imrana Qadeer, Professor (Retired), Jawaharlal Nehru University, Visiting Professor, Council for Social Development, New Delhi, India

Dr. David Rosner, PhD, Ronald H. Lauterstein Professor of Sociomedical Sciences and History, Co-Director, Center for the History & Ethics of Public Health, Columbia University, Mailman School of Public Health, New York, U.S.A

Dr. Divyang Shah, DGM - Occupational Health & Medical Services, Cairn India, Gurgaon, India

Dr. Craig Slatin, Sc.D., MPH, Professor, Department of Community Health and Sustainability, University of Massachusetts Lowell, USA; Editor, New Solutions: A Journal of Environmental and Occupational Health Policy

Dr. Colin L. Soskolne, Professor Emeritus, University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB, Canada; Adjunct Professor [July 1, 2013 - June 30, 2016], Faculty of Health, University of Canberra, Australia; Chair, International Joint Policy Committee of the Societies of Epidemiology (IJPC-SE); Fellow, Collegium Ramazzini, Italy

R. Srivatsan, member of the Convening Team, Medico Friend Circle; Senior Fellow in Development and Health, Anveshi Research Centre for Women's Studies, Hyderabad, India
Dr. Leslie Thomas Stayner, PhD, Professor of Epidemiology, Division of Epidemiology & Biostatistics, University of Illinois at Chicago, School of Public Health Chicago, USA

Dr. Ken Takahashi, MD, PhD, MPH, Professor of Environmental Epidemiology, IIES; Director of the WHO-CC for Occupational Health, IIES; University of Occupational & Environmental Health, Kitakyushu City, Japan

Dr. Jim teWaterNaude, MBChB, MPhil (MCH), FCPHM, Public Health Medicine Specialist, Chair iMig2014 Cape Town; Honorary Senior Lecturer, University of Cape Town, South Africa

Dr. Annie Thebaud Mony, directrice de recherche honoraire à l’INSERM, Université Paris-13, Bobigny, France

Dr. Fernand Turcotte, MD, MPH, FRCPC, Professeur émérite de santé publique, Faculté de médecine, Université Laval, Québec, Canada

Dr. Louise Vandelac, Ph.D., Professeure titulaire, Institut des sciences de l’environnement et Département de sociologie, Université du Québec à Montréal, Québec, Canada

Maria Angela Vigotti, Epidemiology Researcher, Biology Department, Pisa University, Italy

Professor Andrew Watterson, PhD, CFIOSH, Occupational and Environmental Health Research Group, School of Health Sciences, University of Stirling, Stirling, Scotland

Dr. Stanley H. Weiss, MD, FACP, FACE, Professor of Preventive Medicine and Community Health, Rutgers, New Jersey Medical School; Professor of Quantitative Methods and Epidemiology, Rutgers School of Public Health, Newark, NJ; Immediate Past Chair, International Joint Policy Committee of the Societies of Epidemiology; Cancer Liaison Physician and Oncology Committee Vice-chair, University Hospital, Newark, NJ, USA

Dr. Josette Wier, MD, Smithers, British Columbia, Canada

Dr. Hans-Joachim Woitowitz, MD, Professor emeritus; Former Director, Institute and Outpatient Clinic of Occupational and Social Medicine, University of Giessen, Germany

Dr. Zulmiar Yanri, Medical Doctor, Doctor of Philosophy on Public Health, Specialist on Occupational Medicine; Former position: Head of Occupational Safety and Health Center, Ministry of Manpower, Republic of Indonesia

Dr. Jean Zigby, MD, Family Physician, Palliative Care Specialist, Québec; President, Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment, Canada

Dr. Amerigo Zona, MD, Senior Researcher, Italian National Health Department of Environment and Primary Prevention, Rome, Italy