

Asbestos Time Bomb in Bangladesh

A Field Assessment Report

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Study Conducted by:



Bangladesh Occupational Health, Safety and Environment Foundation (OHSE)

www.oshebd.org

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Preamble

Just a 3 minutes ride in a motorbike from the other side of Buriganga bridge from Dhaka city inside Basundhara River View project. Give a look left and you will find big sized new ships are being built. Hundreds of workers are busy with that. Thanks to the ship building industry, Bangladesh is building new ships fulfills domestic needs and exporting to Western countries. But what western countries are exporting to Bangladesh. The list is big and in many cases important for Bangladesh economy. But the list includes name asbestos.

Really harmful, dangerous and damaging for the people of Bangladesh. Where these asbestos come from, where these asbestos are being processed, where these asbestos are being used remain almost hidden here. But near the ship building yard on the other side of river Buriganga of Dhaka city OHSE research team has found a number of small cottage-like dens where asbestos are being processed. The place is out of general peoples sight, here a number of male and female work. They process asbestos, first burn the raw asbestoses into liquid then turn it into solid form in cases of different shapes. And finally supply the solid asbestos to the market. Here the raw forms of asbestoses are being processed said by an expert gives legal supports to the importers of asbestos.

Most of the cases asbestos comes from abroad as an imported good are directly going to the local market for multiple uses.

Bangladesh is the 31st top country in the world in the line of consuming asbestos. Canada, Russia, South Africa, Mozambique, Turkey, Austria, Brazil, USA, Australia, and Oman are listed as exporters of asbestos and asbestos contained materials to Bangladesh

Its annual consumption is on an average 8,500 tones involving about 1.5 million dollar. The use of domestic consumption is growing side by side increase import of raw asbestos and asbestos contained finished materials inside to country on recent years with having little public information and knowledge as well as legal instruments to take a controlling measures of it.

Furthermore, in Bangladesh asbestos is recovered by manual crushing and then re-crusted, or-re-formed, for re-use.

Asbestos is still not necessarily regulated as hazardous waste in Bangladesh. Asbestos is being used in many purposes.

Besides founding asbestos and asbestos contained materials from the source of ship breaking sector located in Chittagong, in Bangladesh many products

contains asbestos are selling and buying at local market without knowing its definite consequence at personal life in long run.

Almost every family in Bangladesh consumes some sort of asbestos. Electric Ceiling fans using inside the house contain with asbestos. The body of the fans are made of asbestos and these are made at the place of the other side of Buriganga, mentioned above. While the research team talked to Masum Hossain, a broker there, in the guise of traders, he was ready to supply as much as needed.

In the area women were found working directly with asbestoses. Sacks of asbestoses kept here and there. While wanted to touch, one of the women stopped, saying, don't touch, it would cause you harm.

Asked, how do they work with such a thing, she said, we have no problem.

These women have been working here for 2/3 years. None found, who worked there for more than 5 years.

This is common; nobody wants to work for long period. As asked none of the workers said, they suffer any physical constraints for this.

Statistical scenario

Import department of the government of Bangladesh was not found that flexible in providing the information on import of asbestos. The research team had to check the code marks of imported goods in Bangladesh and finally the code of asbestos were found as 68.11, 68.12 and 68.13 of the record under the head of Bangladesh Customs Tariff.

In this record the department makes available the information from June 2009 to January 2011 fiscal years' scenario. It shows that during July 2009 to June 2010 fiscal year Bangladesh imported different types of asbestoses worth of USD 1547880 which is equivalent to BDT 10,83,51,600.

The statistics also shows a trend of increase in import of asbestos in Bangladesh. According to import statistics Bangladesh imported asbestos of USD 1,03,866 during July 2010 to January 2011. On an average monthly import is USD 148380 which was more than 15% (USD 1939) more than the average import of every months of the previous fiscal year.

Table: Asbestos imported in Bangladesh

Fiscal Year	Duration	Total Import USD	Monthly import USD	Remarks
2010-2011	July 2010- January 2011	10,03,866	143409	Statistics Locally available but could not be verified from any alternate source
2009-2010	July 2009- June 2010	15,47,880	128990	
<i>Source: Import Department of Bangladesh</i>				
2008	Jan- DEC	417240		
<i>Source: United State Geographical Survey (USGS)</i>				
2007	Jan-Dec	470184	39182	Statistics available in international documents
2006	Jan- Dec	447876	37323	
2005	Jan-Dec	447876	37323	
2004	Jan- Dec	343200	28600	
2003	Jan- Dec	480480	40040	
<i>Source: Publicintegrity.org/asbestos consumption</i>				

Other available data:

- In 2009 Bangladesh imported asbestoses of USD 1.54 million from Canada only.
- USGS data in 2008 2,440 tones of asbestos were imported to Bangladesh
- Using the Canadian data, it was revealed that 98% of the total came from Canada.

- According to a competent source some additional asbestos worth USD 80,000 were imported during 2009-2010 fiscal year in illegal way.

Asbestos use is limited to a handful of products, such as automobile brakes and gaskets. But in Bangladesh, it is booming. The country is now the world's potential asbestos market, consuming over 2500 tones a year.

According to world Asbestos consumption report Bangladesh consume list is the following:

Year	<u>Total consumption (tones)</u>
2003	2800
2004	2000
2005	2610
2006	2610
2007	2740
2008	2440
2009	2500

In year 2009 per ton of asbestos was sold at \$171.60 in the international market.

From the above calculation the total consumption of asbestos in Bangladesh every year is on an average \$ 4,29,000 or TK 3,00,30,000.

The above scenario is about the import and consume of asbestos in legal way. A several rings are active in Bangladesh (both national and international) are engaged in this business in unlawful manner so the total business volume in this field will exceed Tk. 10 crore a year, said a source.

Exporting Countries

Canada, Russia, South Africa, Mozambique, Turkey, Austria, Brazil, USA, Australia, and Oman are listed as exporters of asbestos and asbestos contained materials to Bangladesh (Source: Department of Export and Import, Govt. of Bangladesh).

Country-wise official data not available except Canada.

CANADA:

Bangladesh imports 8974.3 tones of asbestos from Canada, highest exporter of asbestos around the world, worth \$1.54 million in 2009 only. USGS report says, in 2008, shipments of Canadian asbestos accounted for 98% of the asbestos used in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh is the 7th highest importer of Canadian asbestos.

Canadian exports of asbestos in its natural mineral form amounted to \$94.6 million in 2009. India was the top importer for Canadian asbestos, buying \$50.2 million of the mineral or 53.1% of the overall total. Second-place Indonesia imported \$12.3 million worth of Canadian asbestos (13% of total), while third-place Mexico received \$5 million worth (5.3% of total).

Other leading importers for Canadian asbestos include: Thailand at \$4.1 million (4.4% of total); Sri Lanka at \$3.78 million (4% of total); United Arab Emirates at \$3.76 million (4% of total); Pakistan at \$3.4 million (3.6% of total); **Bangladesh at \$1.54 million (1.6% of total)**; Philippines at \$1.5 million (1.6% of total); and Colombia at \$1 million (1.1% of total).

China as one of the major asbestos miner and producer of asbestos goods wants to enter Bangladesh market. Competent sources said the research teams that, the Chinese asbestos traders is maintaining a lobby with Bangladeshi asbestos dealers and in some extend they are going to be successful to take over control of this business in Bangladeshi market.

Importing Firms

The reporting team identified 10 factories from different sources that are directly importing asbestos in Bangladesh. As the item is not a free element to be imported and used in open markets most of the importers keeps no information about them in internet or ready to make available to all. A source said the research team that there are 23 such companies in Bangladesh that imports asbestos directly from different countries.

However the source declines to say the team about other organisation though it confirms the following list as asbestos importer. Among the reported importers six are from Chittagong and 4 are from Dhaka.

The source confirmed that the number of importers is higher in Dhaka than Chittagong.

Importer of Asbestos and asbestos contained materials in Bangladesh

Name of the company / business firms	Product	Area	Address
Abul Khayer Group	Galvanized plain & corrugated sheet	Chittagong	D.T. Road, Pahartali, Chittagong TEL.: 880-31-714541 FAX.:880-31-710051
<i>Aramit Ltd</i>	Raw Asbestos	Chittagong	53.Kalurgahat, Heavy Industrial Estate Chittagong Tel: 70473, 670368 356
<i>ASBETORS CEMENT INDS. (BD) LTD</i>	Asbestos products	Chittagong	53, Kalurghat Heavy I/E. Chittagong
Shima Corporation	Deals with Chemicals, Scrap Steel, Industrial Machineries etc	Chittagong	House#30, Road#03, O. R. Nizam Road, East Nasirabad, Chittagong, TEL.: 880-31-654551 FAX.:880-31-657216
Millennium Corpn. Ltd.	Metal products and raw materials (aluminum, copper, steel,	Dhaka	68-69 Green Road, Concept Tower (5th Flr), Suite 5-H,, Dhaka, Bangladesh(Zip/Postal:1205) TEL.: 880-2-9676554

	steel scrap)		FAX.:880-2-9676059
STARKING TRADING CORPORATION	FLAT STEEL PRODUCTS	Dhaka	E-MAIL : sktc786(@)gmail(.)com MSN ID : sktc786(@)hotmail(.)com SKYPE ID : sktc786 TEL.: 880-15-52200845 FAX.:880-2 -7341316
Minhajxpress – Bangladesh	Exporter of Asbestos Lagging Rope	Chittagong	Address: 348,Rd#14, CHITTAGONG Bangladesh
Asbestos Products	Asbestos & asbestos products	Chittagong	53, Kalurgahat, Heavy Industrial Estate Chittagong Bangladesh Product & Services : Not provided Fax : ---- Tel : 670368
<i>C.r.v.international</i>	Hot roll/ coil, sheet Easy roll/coil , GP , Color sheet, coil and Tin plate materials	Dhaka	9/b, Imamgonj Bazar Lane(Panghat)Chalk Bazar-Dhaka +88 02 7343277
<i>MER Group</i>	Asbestos contained products	Dhaka	suite 116, (2nd fl) Aziz supermarket, Shahbagh, Dhaka Tel 88017761543 88031725676

Types of asbestos and asbestos contained materials imported in Bangladesh

1. Raw Asbestos
2. Article of Asbestos Cement.
3. Cellulose fibre-cement or the like
4. Corrugated Sheets
5. Asbestos sheets
6. Asbestos Panel
7. Asbestos Tiles
8. Asbestos Tubes
9. Asbestos Pipes
10. Asbestos Pipe Fittings
11. Fabricated asbestos fibers: Mixtures with a basis of asbestos or with a basis of asbestos and magnesium carbonate;
12. Articles of such mixtures or of asbestos (for example, thread, woven fabric, clothing, head-gear, footwear, gaskets).
13. Clothing,

14. clothing accessories
15. Footwear
16. headgear
17. Paper
18. Mill hoard
19. Asbestos fiber jointing in sheet or roll
20. Friction materials or articles (sheets, rolls, stips, segments, disks, washers, pads for brakes or clutches)
21. Brake linings or pads

Source: Bangladesh Customs and Tariffs

Nature of storing, sells and delivery system (importers level)

No open information available about storing of Asbestos in Bangladesh. It is known that asbestos are being mainly being processed in Keraniganj where hundreds of small ventures are taken. The activity concentrates mainly in two other areas around Dhaka which are Savar and Kaliganj of Gazipur.

In Chittagong Kalurghat is the main zone for asbestos processing.

The asbestoses are being stored in following processes:

- Raw asbestos
- Metallic form
- Gaseous form
- Food-graded form
- Powder form

Basically raw asbestoses are transferred into the above forms for farther use. But most this is done with a view to ensure risk-less transportation. As its is not open in Bangladesh to use asbestos in the products, the traders transfer the asbestoses in different forms so that they can be transported here and there.



Raw asbestoses are usually stored in the sites where these are processed. At the site other side of Buriganga hundreds of sacks of asbestoses like the photograph was found stored here and there.

Matin, a worker of the site told the research team that there is no problem to store the sacks full of asbestoses in there as it never destroys in both rain and sun.



There are dozens of sites like this one grow up in Keraniganj, a source said. The area is out of localities and always remains out of sights of general people.

Metallic form of asbestos is processed in this area for further use. Matin was explaining the process. The raw asbestoses are burnt in big burners on big sized pan. We first make some dust hot in the burner then throw asbestos on it and it gets a liquid form but never mix up with the dust. The burnt liquids are collected form the burner and pour it into cages of different sizes. The liquids within hours take hard form as gets cool. Then it becomes ready for selling in market for further use.

Local Customers

Asbestos is a product which is involved with everyday life process. It is not known to many that the fan giving you air is made of asbestos. The carpet in your drawing room contains asbestos, the sofa set you are using contains asbestos, the blanket you are using in your bed contains asbestos, the sandals in your feet contain asbestos, the shirt you are wearing is having some forms of asbestos and more alarmingly the juice and other colored food available in the shops and markets are also containing asbestos.

So it is understood that all the factories producing the above things are the customers of asbestos.

See the list with name and address of the company/enterprise/ factories purchase and use asbestos as raw materials at their production facilities in Chittagong and Dhaka. At least 69 companies name, address and type of activities could be known and among the companies 5 from Chittagong, 1 from Bogra, 2 from Narayanganj and 61 from Dhaka.

(list attached as Annex-1)

Uses of Asbestos

In construction industry in Bangladesh asbestos is used in many aspects of building and construction for insulation, sound absorption, pipe insulation and to strengthen cement. Building materials made with asbestos include flooring materials such as resilient floor tiles, vinyl sheet flooring and adhesives used to install floor tile. Wall and ceiling products have also contained asbestos. These include patching and joint compounds, textured paints, acoustical plaster, wall panels, vinyl wall coverings, caulking and putties, wallboard, decorative plaster, outdoor siding, ceiling tiles, ceiling textures and ceiling panels. All these are mostly used in Bangladesh.



Industry manufactures cars with asbestos in the brake shoes and often in the clutch pads and gaskets.

In the shipbuilding industry this is used to insulate boilers, steam pipes, and hot water pipes.

Everyday Exposure is also important. Asbestos paper used in table pads beverage filters, wire insulation and heat mats, carpet, blankets etc.

Asbestos in food

Most alarming use of asbestos in Bangladesh is detected in food items, specially in the frozen food. An expert on anonymity confirmed the research team that a food-graded form of asbestos is used in frozen food like chicken nuts, made porota, samosa, singara.

Tasting salt is directly made of such asbestos and widely available in Bangladesh Market.

This is used for taste making and also used in packet juice.

Asbestos in cloths

Asbestos is widely used in dying of clothes. The dying factories use liquid form of asbestos to ensure the color more brightening and more longevity.

Customers of finished products

General people, ranges from poor to riches, villager to urban people are the retail customer of the above goods in Bangladesh. Almost every house in the country has some sort of asbestoses inside.

And as most of the above products are highly needed in the country for its development drive the above asbestoses are also always be welcomed.

Case Study 1: Aramit Ltd (Hot Spot)

Most of need of such asbestos products specially in the heavy industries are being supplied by Aramit Ltd. It is situated at 53. Kalurgahat, Heavy Industrial Estate Chittagong.

On April 16 the research team visited the industry to avail some information about it. At the entrance there is a list of different products of different factories of the industry where the name of asbestos related products found absent.

Ibrahim Khalil, Executive Director of Aramit initially did not wanted to meet, later he agreed and said the research team that importing raw asbestoses from abroad Aramit produces the following things:

1. Plain asbestos sheet
2. Corrugated Sheet

3. Asbestos Pipes



Aramit produces all these products using raw asbestoses imported from abroad. However he was not at all ready to give any further details like from which country the raw materials come from etc.

The factory is 40 years old and every body knows about it, said Ibrahim Khalil. As there are high demand in the country the Aramit rarely exports its produced goods to abroad.

Heavy industries, construction sites, storing system are the major customers of Aramit's products.

Contracted, Aramit group chairman and managing director Saifuzzaman Chowdhury informed that they mainly import raw asbestoses from Russia and Canada.

Asbestos plain and corrugated sheets are something specialized cool product. In can absorb heat and heavy industries in their production areas use these sheets and pipes for a more longevity.

Beside the above some other organisation produce asbestos products. These organisations generally produce different asbestos goods though raw asbestos imported from abroad. Later the produced goods again exported to abroad.

These ate some goods that are made of asbestos:

1. Asbestos Gasket Sheets
2. Asbestos Rubber Sheets
3. Hot Rolled Round Steel Billets
4. Stainless Steel Coils
5. Stainless Steel Sheets
6. Steel Coils
7. Tinplate

Beside exports these are also made available in the local market to fulfill local demand.

Case Study 2 : **Asbestos processing site in Keraniganj (Hot Spot)**

The research team found an alarming picture at asbestos processing site in Keraniganj where women were found working without any protection. They were engaged in transforming asbestoses into power or dust. None use mask and more alarmingly some were having their infant babies in their lap.

Asked, if they were aware of any health hazard of the materials they work with, most of the women answered negatively. Some even wanted to say that they had been working there for years together but so far they did not suffer any complicity.

About the children's health they were also found reluctant. One mother said, I have nothing to do. I can not leave my children home as there is none at home and around who can take care of them.



Who are the main regulatory bodies (import area)?

Found no regulatory bodies. Govt. has imposed only 25% import tax on it. Asbestos traders are commonly alleged for hiding the information. Due to that exact volume of imported asbestos cannot be found.

Asbestos use in Bangladesh is increasing day by day. Taking opportunity of world cheap market local importers are increasingly importing the item and using in the products.

The research team has also found a number of organisations giving legal support to the asbestos producer, importer, exporter and dealers. This organisations are working from the business point of view and protect the interest of the businessmen.

Asbestos Lawyers, Law Firms

Legal steps:

This organization claims that they have prepared a comprehensive memorandum on the use of asbestos in Bangladesh, legal position regarding use of asbestos and its consequence. It was a huge report covering all the governing laws, rules and regulations regarding use of asbestos in Bangladesh. The address of the organization is:

M. Moksadul Islam
Barrister-at-Law
Advocate, Supreme Court of Bangladesh
Chamber: **Legal Steps** Tel:+880-2-8651570
(with answer machine) 3A, Sonartori Tower SMS+880 171 300 896812,
Sonargaon Road (Text Message only) Banglamotor, Dhaka 1000
Bangladesh Web: www.legalsteps.com.bd

Jus Counsel

Full Service Law Firm in Bangladesh that has a significant number of clients in the field of asbestos.

Perjowar Center, Level-5
Suit -G31-34, 22, Court House Street, Kotwali
Phone: +01199-017358

Conclusion

Near two dozens of organisations are engaged in asbestos import export activities in Bangladesh. The imported asbestos is circulated through near about 5000 (five thousand) dealers across the country. at least 5,00,000 people are engaged in the business, said a lawyer, work in the sector for several years, on anonymity. According to his information the industry involves Tk. 10 crore every months. And Tk 10 to 20 lac involved in protecting the interests of the business in an illegal manner.

There are involvement of muscle power in the sector. And the information are almost kept secret. International rackets are also active in Bangladesh. However no detail available in this connection but source confirmed about the above statement. A group of Chinese people are engaged, the source said. Very recently 25 Chinese people were arrested in Dhaka and taken to custody. China, one of the major

producers of asbestos wants to penetrate into Bangladeshi huge a non regulated market.

Recommendations:

- Conduct Follow-up Researches and health surveillance at Hot Spots.
- Building constant public awareness raising actions with special focus to workers and community level on asbestos exposure issues.
- Building strategic social alliance (between trade unions, NGOs, Physician Associations, health rights and local Environment movement), mobilization and social pressure over government to take steps for ban asbestos in Bangladesh.
- Building Effective relations with press print and electronic media in relation to Ban Asbestos campaign actions.
- Intensify Advocacy and lobbying with government and policy makers on framing appropriate policy measures and legal instrument in the country towards banning use of asbestos and asbestos contained materials in Bangladesh.
- Continue field based monitoring actions in this regards and publicize the findings on regular basis at national and community level.
- Identify and provide necessary legal support to Asbestos victims.
- Engage possible Public Interest Litigation in Court to get necessary directions over government on Asbestos issue.

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