

How can we use OHS for international organising?

Report from the 2010 OHS Conference, Melbourne

AAWL

Public Meeting

Wednesday 3 November 2010

6:30 - 8 pm Trades Hall, Lygon Street, Carlton

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aawl october 2010

How do we achieve a global ban on asbestos?

Asbestos mining has been banned in Australia since 1983. Australia introduced a ban on companies manufacturing asbestos products in 2003.

The damaging consequences of the asbestos industry continue: 2500 people die every year in Australia from asbestos diseases.

Asbestos was banned through union action. Companies and governments knew it was a killer product, but they did not want to give up profits.

54 countries have banned or drastically restricted asbestos. But the asbestos trade continues. There is money in asbestos. So where workers are not strongly unionised and able to take industrial action, companies keep digging asbestos and ship it where it's still legal to manufacture asbestos products. Companies dig asbestos and manufacture asbestos products only where workers are not in a position to stop it.

We can ban asbestos where our unions are strong. But in many countries our unions are not strong. In many industries union density is very low, and companies can hire casual workers, give no health & safety information, prohibit the establishment of unions, and effectively send the workers away to die from the diseases they have contracted at work. How do we turn this around? How do we say the lives of our brothers and sisters in all countries must not be sacrificed for the profits of the asbestos companies?

We need to support genuine unions which are prepared to take action and ban asbestos. We need strong unions to support organising drives to establish genuine unions in all countries. We need to support newly established unions with information, resources and solidarity visits to encourage them. We need to send our message of solidarity to our brothers and sisters when they take action, often against very repressive companies and governments. We need to support industrial bans on asbestos and support unions that take action to enforce these bans.

More information, international campaigns & resources: www.hazards.org/asbestos

United we win. Ban asbestos

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Asbestos production, consumption and export
Thousand tonnes

