

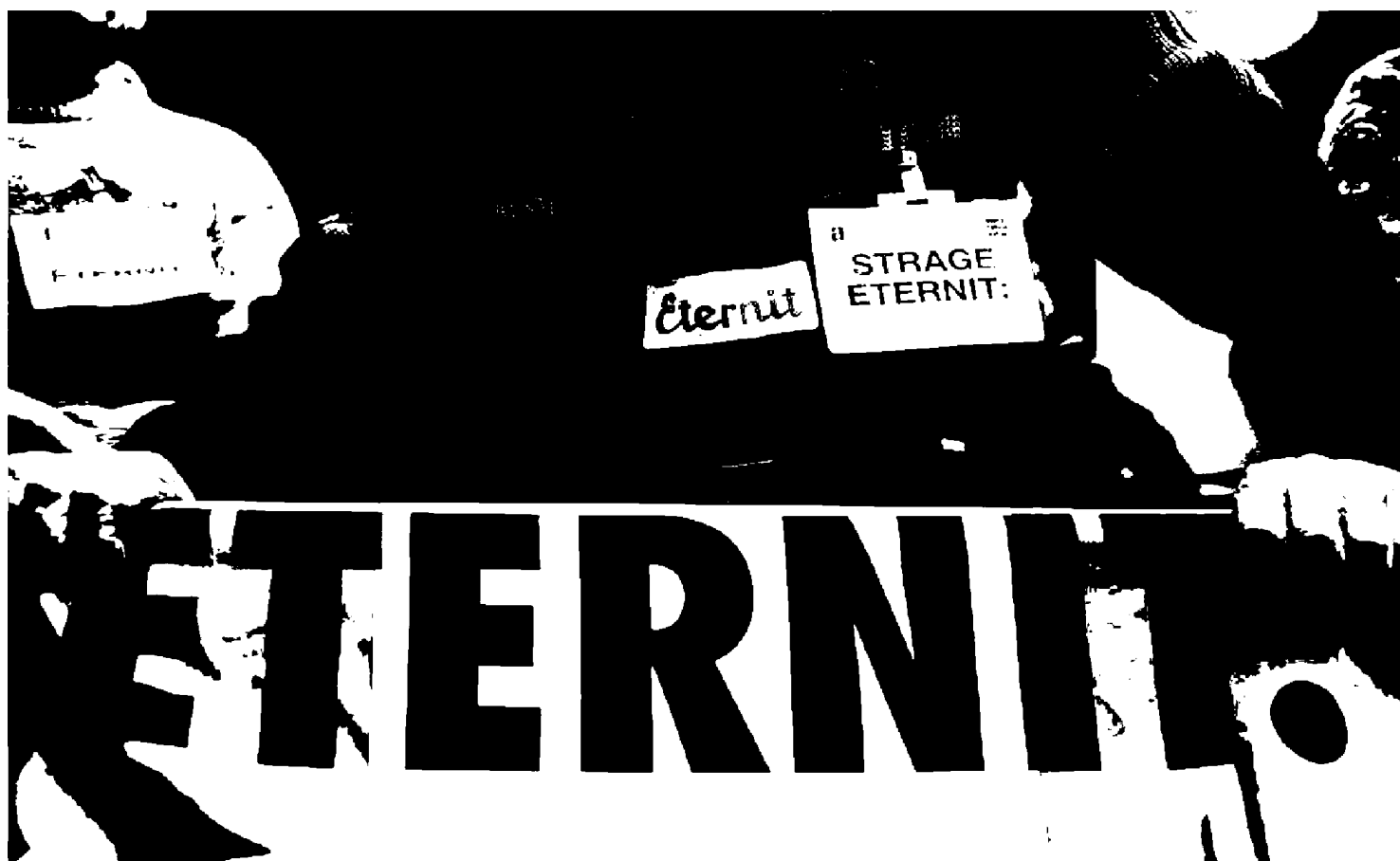
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Sentenced to Prison by Turin Court

Eternit asbestos billionaire sentenced to prison by Turin court



▲ The case against Stephan Schmidheiny in Switzerland was dismissed in 2008 as the ten-year statute of limitations had passed. Keystone / Alessandro Di Marco

Stephan Schmidheiny, the former majority shareholder in Italian asbestos company Eternit Genova, has been sentenced to four years in prison by a Turin court for the death of two workers.

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On Thursday, the court found him guilty of involuntary manslaughter for the death of two Eternit workers at an asbestos plant near Turin decades ago. Schmidheiny will also have to pay a provision of €15,000 (CHF16,832) to various groups, including the Piedmont region, trade unions and associations.

Prosecutor Gianfranco Colace considered the conviction to be a “first step”. Referring to the latest guidelines in case law on liability in the event of death due to asbestos, he hoped “this decision will mark the return of judgements that are more attentive to victims”.

In a statement to the Keystone-SDA news agency, Schmidheiny’s lawyers announced that they would appeal the “scandalous” judgment. The businessman’s lawyers have always maintained that their client did not have any direct responsibility for the management of the company. Schmidheiny was Eternit’s main shareholder from 1973 until its bankruptcy in 1986.

Ghosts from the past

A case against Schmidheiny was first filed in the same Turin court in 2009 after Switzerland’s top court dismissed the charges against him in 2008. In 2012, the Turin court sentenced Schmidheiny to 16 years’ imprisonment for having caused the death of nearly 3,000 people exposed to asbestos from the company’s four plants in Italy. However, in 2014 the Italian Supreme Court quashed the sentence, saying that the case was invalid as the statute of limitations had passed.

Turin prosecutors then went on the offensive with 258 new cases, demanding a new class action suit. However, the attempt was rejected. The most recent trial therefore only concerned two cases that were not time-bound. Proceedings for voluntary manslaughter are ongoing in Naples and Vercelli (Piedmont).



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