

FILE NAME: Kubota (KUB)

DATE: 2015 July

DOC#: KUB045

DOCUMENT DESCRIPTION: Editorial - Asbestos Health Damage Has Yet To Peak

Kubota

Untitled

EDITORIAL: Asbestos health damage has yet to peak

July 01, 2015

It has been 10 years since Kubota Corp., a tractor and heavy machinery manufacturer based in Osaka, revealed that its former plant in Amagasaki, Hyogo Prefecture, had caused health damage--fatal in dozens of cases. The victims included not only its workers but also people living in the plant's vicinity.

Over the last decade, many other cases of asbestos-caused diseases have surfaced around the nation.

All responsible businesses must aid and compensate victims, and the government must continue to stay on top of developments.

In Japan, asbestos became known widely as a major health hazard when a cluster of lung cancer and mesothelioma patients were discovered around Kubota's former Amagasaki plant. These diseases are caused by inhaling asbestos dust.

In the last 10 years, Kubota has paid compensation to 277 victims.

Asbestos has been used widely as a construction material and in the manufacture of braking systems.

In a damages suit brought against the government by former workers, or their bereaved relatives, at asbestos processing plants in southern Osaka Prefecture, the Supreme Court last year ruled that although the government had been aware of the gravity of health damage caused by asbestos, it failed to take adequate measures until 1971.

In 2006, the government instituted the asbestos health damage relief law and set up a system for the payment of health-care bills for victims. So far, about 10,000 former plant workers and nearby residents have been financially compensated under this law.

But the problem is hardly over yet, as mesothelioma's latency period is decades.

Massive volumes of asbestos were imported to Japan from the 1970s through the 1990s, and some specialists predict the mesothelioma outbreak will peak between 2030 and 2035.

The Environment Ministry is in the process of putting together a mesothelioma database in the hope of improving early detection and developing new treatment options. Since clinical cases of mesothelioma are fewer than those for other cancers, it is still too early to provide data to the medical profession.

Asbestos health damage has been reported in the United States, Europe and the rest of Asia. Japanese authorities need to consult experts who are well-versed in overseas cases and use their input for early detection of the disease and effective treatment.

Another major concern has to do with the disposal of asbestos when old buildings are torn down.

According to government estimates, asbestos is believed to be present in about 2.8 million privately owned buildings. The demolition of these buildings is expected to peak around 2030.

Under the nation's air pollution prevention law and other laws, such buildings must be completely covered and sealed during demolition, and the demolition crew must wear protective masks. But even this year, cases of noncompliance with these laws have been discovered in Nagoya and Tokyo, and the offenders were brought to task.

Demolition companies must never underestimate the danger of asbestos that harms not only their workers but neighborhood residents as well.

Every project to tear down a structure where asbestos is present must be reported to prefectural or municipal authorities. In Amagasaki, municipal officials are dispatched to oversee all demolition projects, which total about 600 every year. All other administrative entities should follow suit to ensure that every project complies fully with the required procedures.

There must not be another new victim of asbestos health damage.

--The Asahi Shimbun, July 1

<http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/editorial/AJ201507010027>