



Statement from Linda Reinstein at the U.S. EPA: Environmental Justice Consultation for Asbestos and PV29 Meeting

June 1, 2021

I'm Linda Reinstein, co-founder of the independent non-profit, the [Asbestos Disease Awareness Organization](#) (ADAO). For seventeen years, ADAO has been dedicated to preventing asbestos exposure to eliminate all asbestos-caused diseases.

Over 15 years ago, I watched my husband, Alan, slowly and painfully die from mesothelioma, a preventable asbestos-caused cancer. Like most Americans, we had never heard of mesothelioma and mistakenly believed asbestos had been banned. Alan died with our then 13-year old daughter and me by his side. We are not alone. Each year over 40,000 Americans die from mesothelioma and other asbestos-caused cancers, and it often takes 10-50 years from exposure for disease to present. Asbestos, a known human carcinogen, is one of the world's largest man-made disasters and families like mine pay the price of it every day.

The science is abundantly clear -- there is no safe level of exposure to asbestos. And along with so many other toxic substances, asbestos contributes to environmental racism.

People of color are more likely to live in houses that contain asbestos, attend schools and workplaces that were built using asbestos that have yet to be properly renovated, or work in industries with high exposure and cancer risks.

Although incomplete, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) [found unreasonable risks](#) to consumers and bystanders from all consumer uses of chrysotile asbestos. While most consumer products containing chrysotile asbestos have been discontinued, some products are still available, like aftermarket automotive brakes/linings and certain gaskets. Consumers are at risk of inhaling chrysotile asbestos when they come into contact with these products.

Then there are the commercial users for which EPA [found unreasonable risk](#) to workers, which include chlor-alkali diaphragms, sheet gaskets, brake blocks, aftermarket automotive brakes/linings, other vehicle friction products, and other gaskets. Additionally, EPA found unreasonable risks to workers nearby but not in direct contact with chrysotile asbestos (known as occupational non-users) for the use of chlor-alkali diaphragms, sheet gaskets, brake blocks, and other gaskets.

The chlor-alkali industry is the primary importer and user of raw chrysotile asbestos. The two main ports of entry are located in New Orleans and Houston where [65 percent and 67.6 percent of the residents are Black or Hispanic](#), respectively.

In 2020, Louisiana and Texas imported nearly 300 metric tons of raw chrysotile asbestos. Individuals can be exposed to asbestos as it is moved from the port to the plant, when it is used during the chlor-alkali process, and upon disposal.



According to EPA, Olin Corporation, Occidental Chemical Corporation, and Westlake Corporation/Axiall Corporation use asbestos diaphragms during the manufacturing of industrial chlorine and caustic soda. The chlor-alkali process generates considerable amounts of waste which is managed on site or at disposal facilities, and manufacturing plants and disposal facilities are also frequently located near low-income communities with many people of color.

According to the 2019 Toxics Release Inventory (TRI) data, 38 facilities released an estimated 5,500 metric tons of asbestos. In Louisiana alone, nearly 350 metric tons of asbestos were released, putting the surrounding community at high-risk of exposure

Do-it-yourself mechanics may also be exposed to asbestos when performing automotive repairs with minimal equipment, especially if they lack proper training. Similarly, workers who wear their contaminated clothing home can put their families at risk too.

Today you will hear from [Travis](#), who will speak about his grandfather who worked at Dow Chemical in Plaquemine, Louisiana. This area is often referred to as “Cancer Alley” due to the proliferation of the chemical companies in the area and the high levels of pollution and illness. Travis’ story is one that is all too common and his loss was entirely preventable.

The bottom line is attempts at “risk management” have failed. We’ve seen this over and over again for decades, which is why ADAO urges EPA to move swiftly to prohibit asbestos imports and use. EPA identified in Part I of the chrysotile risk evaluation and finish the Part II Risk Evaluation for the other five fibers, and legacy asbestos found in homes, schools, workplaces, and in superfund sites.

In closing, ADAO has also recently submitted a letter to Administrator Regan voicing our deep concerns about the nomination of Mark Maddaloni Dr.PH, Dennis J. Paustenbach, Ph.D, and David Warheit, PhD to the Clean Air Scientific Advisory Committee. These nominees have known conflict of interests, as noted in their published studies, and the public deserves scientific advisors free from questionable associations

Together, we can make change happen, if we are willing to put public health ahead of corporate profit and admit that it is long past time to act. Thank you for your time.