

AFL-CIO

AMERICA'S UNIONS

September 29, 2020

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the AFL-CIO, I urge you to support the Alan Reinstein Ban Asbestos Now (ARBAN) Act of 2019 (H.R. 1603) scheduled for a floor vote today. This legislation protects working people by banning imports and uses of asbestos, launching a “Right to Know” program, and requiring the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to evaluate the health risks of asbestos already in-place throughout our nation’s buildings and infrastructure. In a remarkable show of bipartisan support, H.R. 1603 passed overwhelmingly in committee 47-1 and, as there are no substantive changes to the bill, we strongly urge you to support this bill for the health of America’s workers.

In 2016, Congress passed the landmark Frank R. Lautenberg Chemical Safety for the 21st Century Act, granting the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) the authority to ban asbestos and address the full range of health risks from exposure. Despite this authority, this Administration's EPA has refused to address any of the major sources of asbestos exposure and the corresponding health risks. Long-overdue, section 3 of H.R. 1603 mandates that the National Academies of Science conduct an assessment of the exposures and health risks posed by asbestos installed decades ago. The last time the government performed such an assessment of in-place asbestos was in the 1980s, and, since then, EPA has moved to allow *new* uses of asbestos in the U.S., in opposition to every medical and health policy recommendation.

Each year, an estimated 40,000 Americans die from asbestos-related cancers and respiratory disease. The World Health Organization has declared that there is no safe level of asbestos, and that the most effective way to prevent asbestos-related disease is to ban all types of asbestos. The COVID-19 pandemic reminds us of the critical need to address exposures to toxic substances that cause chronic, debilitating health conditions which leave working people at increased risk of serious respiratory complications and death from SARS-CoV-2 exposure.

Asbestos exposures affect all sectors of our workforce-- firefighters, construction workers, teachers, utility workers, health care workers, transit workers, and all those who work and live in buildings where asbestos was installed, even if it was decades ago. As our nation’s infrastructure degrades due to age and weathering, working people and the public are in harm’s way. Previously installed asbestos—or so-called legacy asbestos—is especially harmful because it exposes workers to friable asbestos, causing chronic, progressive, debilitating diseases.

American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations

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RICHARD L. TRUMKA
PRESIDENT

ELIZABETH H. SHULER
SECRETARY-TREASURER

TEFERE GEBRE
EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT

Working people have the right to a safe job, including protections from toxic substances. A ban on new asbestos and an assessment of the risks of in-place asbestos are crucial to prevent disease and protect our nation's workers' lives and livelihoods. We strongly urge you to protect working people from the hazards of asbestos by voting yes on the current version of H.R. 1603.

Sincerely,



William Samuel
Director, Government Affairs

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