



Sept 15, 2020

Hon. Monte McNaughton  
Minister  
Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development  
14<sup>th</sup> Floor, 400 University Avenue,  
Toronto, Ontario M7A 1T7  
416-326-7600 | [Minister.MLTSD@ontario.ca](mailto:Minister.MLTSD@ontario.ca)

Subject: Asbestos Exposure at Former GM Property in St. Catharines

Minister McNaughton,

As the Minister of Labour, Training and Skills Development (MLTSD) we would like to bring to your attention a potentially dangerous situation at the former GM Property on Ontario Street in St. Catharines. When demolition was abandoned in 2018 the owner of the property left piles of building debris spread throughout the site. Given the extensive amount of asbestos used in the manufacturing within the site in building materials, pipe insulation etc. there is a high likelihood that asbestos would be found in these piles and in the half demolished buildings still sitting on the site.

Over a period of approximately three decades, thousands of workers were to varying degrees exposed to asbestos until the use of asbestos in brake linings stopped. But asbestos continued to be measured at low levels in these areas for years after meaning the risks associated with asbestos exposure continued to exist. WSIB even acknowledged the existence of a cancer cluster among GM workers who were employed at the Brake and Caliper assembly lines at this GM Property.

Mesothelioma (cancer from asbestos) is a rare but highly fatal cancer. It affects the protective linings covering many of the body's internal organs, most commonly the pleura, which cover the lungs. Almost all mesothelioma is caused by exposure to asbestos.<sup>1</sup> Asbestos is also a lung carcinogen, and there are about 2 asbestos-related cases of lung cancer for every mesothelioma.<sup>3</sup> Recently, the Institute of Medicine in the United States concluded that asbestos is a risk factor for laryngeal cancer and that asbestos may increase the risk of pharynx,

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cancercareontario.ca/en/cancer-facts/mesothelioma-cases-ontario-continue-rise>

stomach and colorectal cancers.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the true burden of asbestos-related cancer extends beyond mesothelioma.<sup>2 3</sup>

Asbestos bags have been observed within some of the debris piles onsite. Asbestos can become airborne with wind patterns, if it remains airborne in the debris piles, it can linger in the air for 48-72 hours, even when there is no air movement. Asbestos eventually breaks down into smaller fibres, the tiny fibres are lightweight and become airborne with little push.

All asbestos should have been removed as part of the demolition. However, the property owner appears to have abandoned their responsibility for cleaning up this site and leaving it safe and secure.

The former GM Property is surrounded on three sides by a residential neighbourhood with a public park and day care centres. The property itself is not secure and there are frequent trespassers on the site including kids from the neighbourhood. Should there be asbestos-containing left exposed on the site then clearly the health of the community is seriously threatened. Minister McNaughton, as MLTSD has jurisdiction over the disposal of Asbestos Containing Materials (ACM)<sup>4</sup> it is the Ministries obligation to inspect the site for ACMs and to apply the necessary regulations to ensure the materials are properly disposed of off-site.

The Coalition for a Better St. Catharines and the community await your prompt response to this letter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Dennis Van Meer". The signature is written in dark ink on a white background.

Dennis Van Meer

Director, Coallition for a Better St. Catharines

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.cmaj.ca/content/178/6/677>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.labournet.net/world/0905/asbest1.html>

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.labour.gov.on.ca/english/hs/pubs/asbestos/asbst\\_3.php](https://www.labour.gov.on.ca/english/hs/pubs/asbestos/asbst_3.php)