



Asbestos Experts Urge Immediate Clean Up of Former GM Site

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For Immediate Release

A group of concerned citizens with experience and expertise with the health hazards of Asbestos, including Mayor Mike Bradley of Sarnia, have sent the Coalition for a Better St. Catharines a letter warning of the risks posed by asbestos on the former GM Site. The group says action needs to be taken immediately to prevent the kind of serious health issues experienced in other cities.

“In Sarnia we have experienced firsthand the tragedy of asbestos” said Sarnia Mayor Mike Bradley ‘hundreds of lives have been lost through exposure to this insidious material used in so many industrial sites throughout Ontario. “

Also signing the letter were two union representatives who were involved with health and safety problems from asbestos exposure at the former GM site. Demolition ceased in 2018 leaving piles of building debris throughout the site as well as half demolished buildings with pipes wrapped in asbestos and asbestos materials likely still in the ceilings.

“For more than 40 years asbestos brake linings were manufactured at the GM site,’ says former Union Health and Safety Officer, John Pula, ‘Asbestos dust was literally everywhere whether from manufacturing or in the equipment, ceilings and pipe wrappings in the buildings. I’m sure if you look for it, you’ll still find asbestos throughout the site.”

Asbestos is a carcinogen that is dangerous when inhaled or ingested. When disturbed, its fibres become present in the air. The Government of Canada recognizes that breathing in asbestos fibres can cause cancer and other diseases. The fibres settle in the lungs and cause diseases like asbestosis and mesothelioma. It often takes decades after exposure for an asbestos-related cancer to develop. The more asbestos and the longer the exposure the greater the risk of developing cancer.

Asbestos is also found in the soil at brownfield sites like the former GM Property. According to the Environmental Abatement Council of Ontario, improper building demolition can lead to a mixture of friable and non-friable products in the soil and can create a significant debris field. As well, Asbestos Cement (AC) piping is extremely common on brownfield sites. Excavation of asbestos cement piping by untrained personnel can lead to extensive contamination.

The danger from asbestos is not limited to exposure on the site. Citizens living near the site and exposed to asbestos from a contaminated environment is not uncommon. To date neither the Provincial Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks or the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development have expressed concern over the potential for asbestos exposure to the residential community bordering the site. MOECP conducted air quality testing this summer but has not confirmed that asbestos was included in its sampling protocol. Testing for asbestos in the air, soil and in surface water is the only way to determine whether the GM Property exposes citizens to health risks from asbestos.

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