

October 14, 2020

To: The Coalition for a Better St. Catharines

From: Citizens concerned about the dangers of asbestos at the former GM factory

The undersigned represent a group of concerned citizens who collectively represent a great deal of experience and expertise in the environmental and human health impacts of asbestos from industrial sites. We are writing to warn you about potential exposure to asbestos at the former GM property and to urge you to immediately take action to protect your community by safely removing all sources of asbestos that remain on the site.

We cannot overstate asbestos' threat to the health of your community. We have experienced the tragedy of hundreds of cancer deaths (mesothelioma) directly related to exposure to even minimal amounts of asbestos from industrial sites.

“Every day, there are people in Sarnia dying of mesothelioma, the incurable disease almost exclusively caused by asbestos.” Sandy Kinart, Chair, the Victims of Chemical Valley

This threat is not only related to occupational exposure but exposure from wind-born fibres as well as asbestos in the soil and surface water migrating outside of the site. In Sarnia we experienced a tragic death of a 14-year-old boy who died after exposure to asbestos brought into his home on his father's work clothes.

We urge the Coalition for a Better St. Catharines to move forward with maximum speed and pressure to get the former GM site cleaned of all asbestos left on the site. This includes asbestos on the surface, in the half-demolished buildings, in the debris piles and in the soil. As well we urge you to test for the presence of fibres in the soil surrounding the site.

The former GM property is likely saturated with asbestos fibres. From the late 1950s (and perhaps earlier) until approximately 1990, GM workers continuously manufactured and assembled brake assemblies containing asbestos brake linings on both the East and West sides of Ontario Street. These fibres were observed everywhere on the site including in the air the workers breathed. This exposure led to many asbestos cancer deaths. WSIB Claims Adjudicator explicitly acknowledged the existence of a cancer cluster among the workers at the GM Plant in St. Catharines.

Significantly the danger to the workers did not end with the cessation of the use of asbestos brake linings. Airborne asbestos fibres were still present in the area years later. General Motors' hygienist has acknowledged the continued presence of asbestos in the area up to the early 1990s.

Asbestos fibres are likely still present in the area to this day in the soil, on overhead ceiling pipes and other building materials in the half-demolished buildings or in the debris piles left on the site.

You cannot afford to sit back and rely on government agencies to protect your community. In our experience, government agencies have been painfully slow to act. Complacency about possible asbestos exposure can only lead to tragedy.

There is no safe level of exposure to asbestos. In the strongest terms we urge the citizens of St. Catharines to demand that any asbestos remaining on the site be fully and safely removed, without delay.

Bruce R. Allen, Paralegal, St. Catharines
praxis1871@gmail.com

His Worship Mike Bradley, Mayor of Sarnia
mike.bradley@sarnia.ca

James Brophy, PhD, Occupational Health Specialist, University of Windsor
jimbrophy@yahoo.com

Sandra Kinart, Chair, the Victims of Chemical Valley
sandraKinart@hotmail.com

John Pula, Union Representative for Health and Safety, GM plant, St. Catharines
j.pula@hotmail.com