

## **An Open Letter To the Members of Parliament of Canada**

Thank you for the opportunity to connect with you today.

My name is David Hill, I am 55 years, a husband and father of three, and I live in a small town in Alberta - but only for the next 2 to 5 years, according to my doctor.

I have a rare, terminal cancer called Mesothelioma that has only one cause, and that is contact with the mineral Asbestos.

The link between asbestos contact and fatal illness has been apparent since 200 AD when Roman overseers noticed that their slaves working in mineral mines were dying. The first documented death from contact with asbestos occurred in 1906. The medical community demonstrated a conclusive link between working in close proximity to asbestos and terminal organ cancers in 1924. In 1930, the disease was linked with abdominal and respiratory disease, and in 1941 that disease became known as mesothelioma. Since that time over countless people, including 100,000 Americans working in the ship building and maintenance industry alone have died far ahead of their time. In Canada, we seem not to have kept track of our own body count; our government accountants and policy wonks chose economic gain over human life and continued to refute the cancer danger well into the 1950's.

The only time I have been in contact with asbestos in my life was during my service with the Royal Canadian Navy Reserve when I was a university student. You don't need to be a miner or an industrial worker to get this disease; all you need is a single, microscopic encounter to fatally poison you. I was a navigating officer trainee posted to naval ships that were constructed between 1944 and 1952. They were packed with asbestos, the wonder material Canada was promoting in that era. My bed aboard ship had an asbestos clad pipe running over it, and we learned to fight fires in an asbestos filled simulator. No one advised us that there was any danger, our officers told us everything was safe and to get on with the job of defending our fellow Canadians. I was in the Naval Reserve for 17 years, and was promoted and decorated for my service. As a Reservist, I was proud to be "twice the citizen" as Winston Churchill called us. But I did not know that my dedication to our country would be rewarded with an early and terrible death.

Mesothelioma is an insidious disease, it lies in wait for 30 years, and then arises quickly and finishes you off. Microscopic asbestos fibres invade your respiratory and digestive systems undetected, and settle in the lining of your lungs or abdomen. They cause a cancer that grows inside your living tissue, very, very slowly, resulting in thickening and swelling of the mesothelial linings, with lesions that erupt inside like scabs, and form grey tendrils about an inch long that look a bit like shag carpet. As the disease spreads and matures, infected tissues connect with your vital organs and begin to kill you from the inside out; after that, the disease metastasizes and spreads rapidly throughout your lymphatic system. There are no warning signs or incidents that trigger detection. Symptoms begin with a persistent cough or stomach cramp, followed by sense of fatigue and a bit of weight loss. By the time you realize you might have something other than a cold, is already too late, and you are gone within 2-5 years.

There is no cure for mesothelioma, only chemotherapy, radiation, and surgery targeted at delaying mortality. I was diagnosed in 2015 and will have the operation to try and prolong my life; there is a 40% chance I may last another 10 years with constant care. I have lived a good and productive life, I have

served my family and my country well, and I lie awake at night wondering how I deserve to meet such an end.

Asbestos is now everywhere in our environment. It's in the insulation and floor tiles, pipes and ductwork of your schools, and in the concrete, bricks, pipes and fireplace cement, heat, fire, and acid resistant gaskets, pipe insulation, ceiling insulation, fireproof drywall, flooring, roofing, lawn furniture, and drywall joint compound of your homes. In 2011 it was reported that over 50% of homes, schools, government and commercial buildings still contain asbestos, despite the current regulation of installation of new asbestos products.

It only takes a momentary, microscopic connection with the mineral to cause infection. The long latency period of asbestos related cancers means that people infected today will not be diagnosed until 2045. Canada's mesothelioma cancer rate is now one of the highest in the world. Our persistence in denying the toxic effects and in permitting its production and use in thousands of products has laid the groundwork for exposing us all. About 2.1 of every 100,000 Canadians are diagnosed each year and it is expected that the death rate will climb for several more years.

We have a political obsession with our national debt, I often hear about how we should not be passing our debt to our grandchildren; Parliamentarians, we have a latent asbestos debt in this country, and if we do not act to remove this horror from our environment, we are murdering our grandchildren.

As of 2014, 44 countries have banned use of asbestos in their environments, including Australia, the UK, most of Western Europe, the Middle East, South Africa, Argentina, South Korea and even Mozambique. Why does Canada, a supposedly advanced and progressive nation, continue to choose asbestos over the lives of its future generations? Only you can answer that.

My time will soon be up, but my children, and someday, I hope, my grandchildren whom I will never see, will continue to build our great society. I implore you to act to ensure their health and safety, and to give final meaning to my life, and to the lives of the thousands of asbestos victims now lost, and to the hundreds of thousands of victims yet to come.

Sincerely,



David Hill  
Water Valley, Alberta

A handwritten signature in blue ink. The signature is stylized and somewhat cursive, starting with a large loop and ending with a long horizontal line that extends to the right. The signature is positioned above the printed name and address.