

Letter to the Editor

Asbestos and Digestive Tract Cancers

While inhaled amphibole asbestos fibers have long been confirmed as the cause of pleural and pulmonary pathologies, there is still a lingering debate over the potential risks from ingested asbestos fibers, from either drinking tap water or workplace exposure. Recently, an extensive report from a study over a three-year period conducted under the French National Agency for the Sanitary Safety of Food, Environment and Work (ANSES) concluded that results from existing epidemiological and experimental studies do not provide sufficient basis to establish a clear association at the present time between ingested asbestos and digestive tract cancers.¹

The report is extremely critical of other studies published in the past decades which had concluded that the risks associated with the ingestion of asbestos fibers were underestimated and that there had been methodological bias and selective data gathering in those studies.

It is noted that, exaggerated claims of asbestos risks in Thailand appeared in the media a few years after importation of the mineral for industrial use, and such claims have surged from time to time. Pros and cons of the discussion are evidently derived from non-scientific misunderstanding and sometimes fraud, seemingly occurring against a political background which has proven confounding.^{2,3} To the present author, setting aside political decisions, it is the time to act in light of the ample scientific opinion. The debate should come to an end.⁴

References

1. French Public Health Agency Conducted Extensive Review. Ingested asbestos fibres seems not to be linked to digestive tract cancers. Snapshot News, December 20, 2021.
2. Bovornkitti S. ed. *Proceedings of the Forum on the Use of Crysotile in Thai Industries and Health Impacts*. The Academy of Science, The Royal Society of Thailand, Bangkok;2014:112.
3. Bovornkitti S, Pitukpakorn M. Asbestos-related Diseases in Thailand: Past Experiences: Current and Future Perspectives. *Tham Med J*. 2019;19:215-219.
4. Bovornkitti S. Time to Act. *AMJAM*. 2021;21(2):163.

Somchai Bovornkitti

The Academy of Science, The Royal Society of Thailand