



THE GROWING THREAT OF Asbestos

The Canadian aftermarket is slowly waking up to the realization that asbestos is still coming into Canada in the form of imported brake friction products – and the volume at which it is entering the country continues to grow.

According to recent Canadian media reports, Statistics Canada reported that imports of asbestos-related items increased to \$6 million in 2015 from \$4.9 million in 2013. The reports suggest that the majority of these goods are from asbestos brake linings and pads, valued at some \$3.6 million in 2014.

Asbestos was once a commonly used material in a wide range of products in Canada, including floor tiles and thermal/electrical insulation; products used in the construction of homes, hospitals, schools, office towers and apartment buildings; and automotive brake friction. Asbestos in brakes provided a means for better heat distribution and noise reduction. However, asbestos has a long history of causing health issues to those who are exposed to it. Long-term exposure can potentially lead



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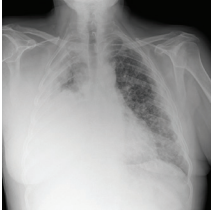
to two kinds of cancers: cancer of the lung tissue, and mesothelioma, a cancer of the membrane that surrounds the lungs and other internal organs.

Since the 1980s, there has been an ongoing effort to remove asbestos from use in construction and manufacturing of

products, including in the manufacture of brake friction.

While domestic makers of brake friction in Canada and the United States have moved away from using asbestos, this has not stopped foreign makers of brake

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friction from doing so. This has meant that asbestos is still finding its way into brake friction products coming into North America.

“We can tell you that the Ministry of Labour has been aware of brake pads with asbestos being imported into Canada since 2012,” says Janet Deline, a spokesperson with the Ministry of Labour. “According to Statistics Canada reports, more than \$2.6 million worth of brake pads containing asbestos entered Canada in 2011, with more than half imported into Ontario. While the ministry does not track the use of aftermarket brakes in this industry, we are aware that these products pose an increased risk of asbestos-related diseases for auto brake mechanics.”

What may come as a surprise to Canadian automotive technicians is the Canadian government does not currently prevent the importation of brake friction products containing asbestos.

Rick Jamieson, president and CEO of ABS Friction Inc., says he is not surprised that Canadian technicians are unaware; Canadians as a whole are not aware that products that use asbestos are still allowed to come into Canada. “The public thinks it is banned, and mechanics think it is banned, and the reality is it is not,” Jamieson says. “If it was banned in Canada, it would not be imported here.”

Jamieson says that the reason why such products come into the Canadian market is simple – price. Brake friction using asbestos in its formulation is sold as an inexpensive aftermarket brake product.

Steve Fletcher, managing director with the Automotive Recyclers of Canada, says it has been some 25 years since asbestos was used by OEMs in domestically produced brake friction. However, Fletcher adds, an importer of brake friction products may not be aware that asbestos is in the products, because there is nothing on the product

to indicate that asbestos has been used.

For members involved in vehicle recycling, the issue of asbestos only came up recently when the government of Ontario began consultations last year looking at amending the Environmental Bill of Rights (EBR) and proposals regarding standards for end-of-life vehicle processors.

“We always had a voluntary code

of how our members can depollute a vehicle,” says Fletcher. “We have taken [that code] to the government as to how vehicles can be handled, how to safely handle the removal of ozone-depleting substances, the collection of fluids and such. [The government] put asbestos on the table about a year ago, and our assumption was that [asbestos] had

Before You Start

Consult the Joint Health and Safety Committee’s asbestos assessment for information about exposure in your workplace.

While You Are Working

- ▶ Make certain your work area is well ventilated with a mechanical local exhaust, or wear a supplied-air positive-pressure respirator; if necessary, consult a hygienist or a ventilation engineer to make sure that you have the proper exhaust system.
- ▶ Keep your hair covered and wear protective clothing such as coveralls that you can take off to avoid carrying the dust with you.
- ▶ Remove dust using a vacuum equipped with a high efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter; do not bang the drum to remove dust, or blow dust out of brake drums or clutch housings with an air line.
- ▶ If a vacuum is not available, wet the assembly with a wet-washing unit, low-pressure water, or gentle spray; then wipe with a clean, damp rag and dispose of the used rags in a plastic bag while they are still wet. Carefully close the bag without disturbing the asbestos.
- ▶ Collect washings and dust on floors and around equipment and dispose of them using a vacuum with a HEPA filter or by wet-sweeping.
- ▶ Use a slow-turning lathe to reduce dust instead of grinding brake linings.

Information provided by Health and Safety Ontario, “Replacing Brake Drums, Shoes, or Pads”

“Currently there are no specific safety blitzes focused on asbestos exposure during vehicle brake replacement and repair inspections; however, ministry inspectors may look for this hazard when they visit repair garages for any reason,” says the Ministry of Labour’s Deline. “During these visits they take enforcement action if they determine that employers are not complying with the Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA) and its regulations regarding worker exposure to asbestos. Under OHSA, there are three regulations addressing occupational exposures to asbestos: O. Reg. 490/09 – Designated Substances; O. Reg. 278/05 Designated Substance – Asbestos on Construction Projects and in Buildings and

already been phased out.”

The amendments proposed for end-of-life vehicle waste disposal included a range of contaminants that now have to be removed prior to the crushing or shredding of a vehicle. These contaminants include such obvious things as fuels, brake and steering fluids, coolant fluids, refrigerants, batteries, and tires. Amongst the things to be removed were brake pads containing asbestos (go to www.ebr.gov.on.ca and click the links to see the list of proposed products).

“Right now, when we dismantle a vehicle, we are not going down to the brake pad level, and we are not cracking open the brake drum,” Fletcher continues.

“Ten years ago, we might have done so, as some of the parts could be reused. But the economics now make doing so not worth the effort. But under the new regulations, with the requirement to remove the brakes, you are now exposing us to a hazard that we were not exposed to before.”

For technicians, the hazard comes from exposure to dust that can contain asbestos and can be released during a brake job on a vehicle. That can occur from a technician cleaning brake assemblies and clutch housings, grinding brake linings, and even sweeping floors. Health and Safety Ontario has listed a series of safe work guidelines to protect technicians from asbestos dust. ■JN

Repair Operations; and Regulation 833 – Control of Exposure to Biological or Chemical Agents.”

Jean-Francois Champagne, president of the Automotive Industries Association of Canada (AIA Canada), says the AIA is working to have the government of Canada move toward banning the importation of products that contain asbestos.

“There is no specific federal ban on asbestos, and we announced in a press release that we and others are asking for a complete ban on asbestos products,” Champagne explains. “We want to make sure our members understand the issue and the risk posed by asbestos, and taking all steps that are reasonably possible to make sure that they are not importing, selling, and installing and servicing products with asbestos. It means talking with your supplier and distributors, and talking to importers.”

Champagne adds that any legislation proposed by the federal government needs to be structured in a way that not only stops products coming into Canada, but allows time to remove existing products from the marketplace and from vehicles.

“The AIA would not endorse a plan that would suggest we pull all cars off the road and check what brake friction the vehicle has, and if asbestos is found, to remove and replace that friction right away. That is just not feasible. How you phase in such legislation is an important question.”

The United States has been moving aggressively to tackle the problem, both at the state and federal levels of government. Recently, a memorandum of understanding was signed between the Environmental Protection Agency, the Environmental Council of the States, and the Brake Manufacturers Council that addressed the issue of copper in brake friction. California and Washington State had earlier passed laws to regulate copper in brake friction. Those laws effectively became an industry-side de-facto standard. As well as reducing copper in brake friction, asbestos and other materials are covered as well. The addition of asbestos will impact importation of brake friction that uses asbestos in its formulations.

“A Department of Commerce report identified US\$2.2 million in asbestos-containing brake friction materials were imported into the U.S. in 2013; China accounts for more than half of those imports,” says Leigh Merino, senior director, regulatory affairs, with the Motor & Equipment Manufacturers Association (MEMA). “U.S. manufacturers do not use asbestos in their products, due to toxicity and state laws. For example, in addition to reducing

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– JEAN-FRANCOIS CHAMPAGNE,
PRESIDENT, AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRIES
ASSOCIATION OF CANADA

copper in brake friction materials, the California and Washington laws also required the removal of other constituents in brake pads, including asbestiform and other materials, by the years 2014 and 2015, respectively.

“Furthermore, the Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA) Reform legislation currently being considered in Congress would provide stronger EPA authority to regulate toxic chemicals already in commerce. MEMA and AASA have indicated industry support for stronger authority in this area as well as a renewed EPA effort to regulate asbestos, particularly in imported brakes.”

Merino adds the government-industry collaboration on the voluntary “Copper-free Brakes Initiative” memorandum of understanding, which is based on the timelines and requirements of California and Washington, was necessary to establish a national-level program to ensure consistency in reporting requirements and recognition of the industry’s compliance with those laws.

“Brake manufacturers, vehicle manufacturers, and other key stakeholders have fully supported the efforts,” Merino continues. “California and Washington State have enforcement authority clearly articulated in their respective laws where they can assess civil penalties for parties that knowingly violate the law. Civil penalties can be levied against not only brake friction materials manufacturers, but also to distributors, retailers, and vehicle manufacturers.”