Korea

In January 2007, test results confirmed the presence of asbestos fibers in 14 stations[50] on three lines of Seoul's subway system. The fibers were liberated from products used in the 1970s and 1980s for noise and heat insulation; whilst the use of asbestos-containing materials by the Seoul Metro company ceased in 2001, hazardous products already in situ, such as ceiling tiles, were not removed. Even though a spokesperson for the testing company, ETS Consulting, downplayed the risks saying that airborne asbestos in the stations was "below the permissible level," Seoul Metro promised to decontaminate the stations and remove contaminated materials.

The asbestos in the subway is a legacy of nearly fifty years of asbestos use in Korea. The life cycle of the asbestos industry in Korea has had three distinct phases:

Expansion (1960-1982) The industry's expansion was fuelled by overseas investment, principally from Japan and Germany, with foreign companies transferring hazardous technologies abroad in light of increasing restrictions at home. Concurrently, Korean policies to stimulate the construction and manufacturing sectors boosted asbestos demand; the lack of any health and safety regulations meant companies were spared the expense of installing control measures or providing personal protective equipment for workers. As the asbestos industrial sector matured, the production of asbestos textiles increased; these products required a higher quality of fiber and import patterns reflected this shift in consumption.

Plateau (1983-1995) Although consumption was adversely affected by the introduction of the (Korean) Industrial Safety and Health Act (1981), asbestos had not yet become a social issue.

Decline (1996-Present) As active regulation of hazardous working conditions began, Korean producers of asbestos textiles and brake linings relocated to China and other countries in Southeast Asia. The diagnosis of the first case of mesothelioma in Korea (1994) brought the compensation issue to the fore and the removal of asbestos from old buildings and demolition sites became a social issue. As of August 2006, compensation had only been be paid to 35 mesothelioma and asbestos-related lung cancer claimants most of whom were end-users such as construction and maintenance workers and welders. Korea is 15-20 years behind Japan in its national epidemic of asbestos-related disease. The situation in the subway,[51] and similar incidents will contribute to the increase in asbestos mortality. Ironically, within weeks of the media coverage of the subway contamination, the Labor Ministry announced that an asbestos ban in Korea will take effect in 2009.[52] This decision marks the beginning of the country's attempt to tackle its asbestos legacy; however, work is needed to address the following gaps:

- There is no company in Korea certified by the Government to remove asbestos safely as stipulated in 2003 by the Ministry of Labor; companies undertaking such work only hold licenses for the removal of ordinary construction materials.
- There are no asbestos removal training programs in South Korea; as a consequence, there are no workers with the skills or experience to tackle this work.
- There are only a handful of institutions in South Korea with the facilities for carrying out bulk analysis and sampling of materials suspected to contain asbestos.

Japan

Widespread public awareness of Japan's lethal asbestos legacy began on June 29, 2005, the day the Kubota Corporation disclosed that scores of workers at its former Kanzaki asbestos-cement pipe plant had contracted mesothelioma, an aggressive type of cancer. The company was responding to requests from local mesothelioma victims for data on the amount and types of asbestos used at the factory and the number of workers affected. From 1954-1975, crocidolite and chrysotile were used at this site in the production of asbestos-cement pipes; from 1971-1997, only chrysotile was used for the manufacture of construction materials, mainly roofing products. The first occupational asbestos death caused by the Kanzaki plant was an asbestosis fatality which occurred in 1979; seven years later, the first Kubota worker died of mesothelioma. By March 2005, there had been 75 asbestos-related deaths amongst the Kanzaki workforce; by March 2006, this figure had risen to 105. As the factory had employed a total of 1,015 workers for more than one year, this means that more than 10% of all the workers have died of asbestos-related diseases.

Hazardous exposure to Kubota asbestos was not confined to