



Setting the Scene

The shift in global asbestos consumption patterns which began in the 1980s continued into the new century: while industrialized economies shunned asbestos, developing countries increased consumption in response to economic changes and aggressive marketing campaigns by industry stakeholders. Figures released in early 2007 confirm the prominence of Asian asbestos markets; 90% of the countries with the highest percent increases in consumption are in Asia (Appendix A).¹ In 2005, India's asbestos-cement industry accounted for nearly 10% of worldwide asbestos consumption.

The effects of the increasing utilization of asbestos in Asia are as predictable as they are avoidable. Wherever asbestos has been used ill-health, disability, death and environmental pollution have followed. Decades after reports by factory inspectors, victims' groups and trade unions of the tragic consequences of hazardous exposures, scientists finally confirmed the existence of a European epidemic of asbestos-related disease.² The same year (1999), the use of all types of asbestos was banned throughout European Union (EU) Member States;³ most other developed countries have also banned or seriously restricted the use of this acknowledged carcinogen. Unfortunately, the long latency period of asbestos-related diseases means that asbestos deaths in Europe will continue for decades to come (Appendix B). In Asia, where only one country has banned asbestos, the situation is bound to get worse as exposure to the world's biggest industrial killer increases. The majority of people currently being exposed to asbestos live in Asian countries.