

**The situation of abandoned asbestos mines in Brazil**  
**Following the trail of mineral activities and their negative social and environmental**  
**impacts: The Jaramataia case in Alagoas**

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The Barreto Mining Co. (Mineração Barreto S. A.) – or simply “MIBASA” – located at Road AI 220, S/N, KM 03, District of Caititus, Arapiraca, lets anyone who visits its asbestos deposit fields know (including the Labour Inspectors and other sanitary authorities) that asbestos extraction activities, which had started in 1948, were halted over 15 years ago (since the early 1990s) as the demand for the product decreased both abroad and locally.

This same information is provided in the Brazilian Mineral Yearbook published by the National Department of Mineral Production – DNPM – linked to the Ministry of Mining and Energy. The DNPM is a ferocious defender of asbestos extraction in the country and it is also responsible for the inspection of the deposits, mining activities, and for any mineral deposit activities in Brazil. It is this Department that issues permits and revokes any authorization given to mining extraction. The 2002 issue of the Yearbook makes no mention of the Jaramataia deposit in the state of Alagoas.



**View of the old area of extraction, over 100m deep.**

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<sup>1</sup> Fernanda Giannasi is an Inspector of Labour working in the State of São Paulo, Brazil. During a career of 21 years, she has been concerned about asbestos pollution and has inspected factories, asbestos mines, residential areas and the countryside for signs of hazardous contamination.



**View of the old extraction cave (above) and distribution of the asbestos fibers in the rock(below).**



Currently, there is no sign of mineral extraction activity related to asbestos directly. The company chairman explains that the building that can be seen from the distance (see the following photograph) belongs to MIBASA too, and produces and bottles “Campestre” mineral water that naturally springs from the rocks. According to MIBASA’s website ([www.mibasa.com.br](http://www.mibasa.com.br)) this mineral water is said to contain healing and medicinal properties.

- **Campestre Mineral Water**



A “Health Village” has been built where the old asbestos mine used to be – it is a kind of spa or a health and beauty treatment center. All products used in the treatment center are locally produced from locally extracted minerals.

Mibasa’s website also provides detailed and specific information on how asbestos was first “found” on the company site and about the products they manufacture, among them the “Campestre” bottled mineral water, as well as the products for health and beauty treatments. It also provides information on how to benefit from the peaceful location and the healing properties of the local energy. In Campestre, the “paradise of health, one can find a solution to eliminate plant and animal diseases, as well as human diseases, together with the medicinals to treat these diseases”.



Fragment of rock collected for tests of its mineral and fiber content.

- Main entrance porch at the “Health Village” with its lodgings and beauty treatment center – ( photo from MIBASA’s website)





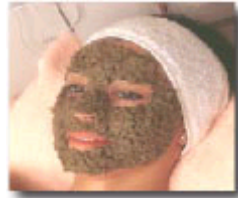
Products manufactured by MIBASA which were analyzed for the presence of asbestos fibers: mineral samples, Campestre mineral water re-bottled in 330ml plastic bottles, Line MISBET products as ointment cream, powdered clay “mineralizador”, salt and Fabiane oil.

- **“Auditorium”** – a mystical place of highly concentrated subtle energy – (MIBASA’s website)



The “auditorium” is the place where people with mystical and esoteric beliefs gather to meditate. They come from all over and sit on rocks shaped like benches. They believe it to be a place where energy is highly concentrated.

- **Treatment center** – (photo taken from MIBASA’s website at: [http://www.mibasa.com.br/inter\\_br.htm](http://www.mibasa.com.br/inter_br.htm) )



### **Analysis results**

The samples (as shown in the next photo) were sent to the MVA Scientific Consultants Laboratory in the USA. They underwent several different tests, including electron microscopic fiber type analysis, and the results are as follows:

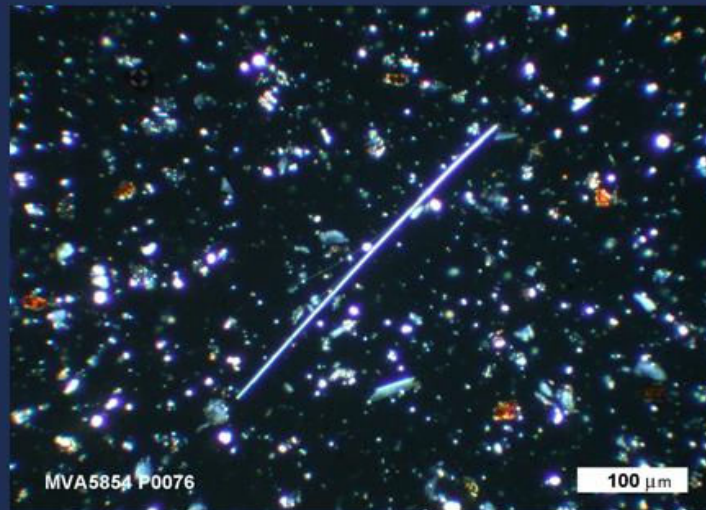
1. **The Jaramataia mineral samples contain 70-80% of anthophyllite asbestos** – all amphibole asbestos types and uses have been banned under Labour Code since 1991, through Administrative Order 01/91, that amended Annex 12 of Standard Rules 15, Chapter V, paragraph II of CLT (National Labour Legislation) and which later were ratified by Law 9055/95 and Ruling Decree 2350/97.

## **AMIANTO ANFIBÓLIO(ANTOFILITA) JARAMATAIA**



2. **Misbet ointment cream** – contains asbestos anthophyllite(amphibole) and chrysotile-“white asbestos”- which uses are still permitted under national legislation - the Law 9055/95 – both samples comprised less than 1% of asbestos fibers.

## CREME MISBET AMIANTO ANFIBÓLIO(ANTOFILITA)



3. **Misbet Salt** – contains anthophyllite asbestos - (less than 1%).

## SAL MISBET AMIANTO ANFIBÓLIO(ANTOFILITA)

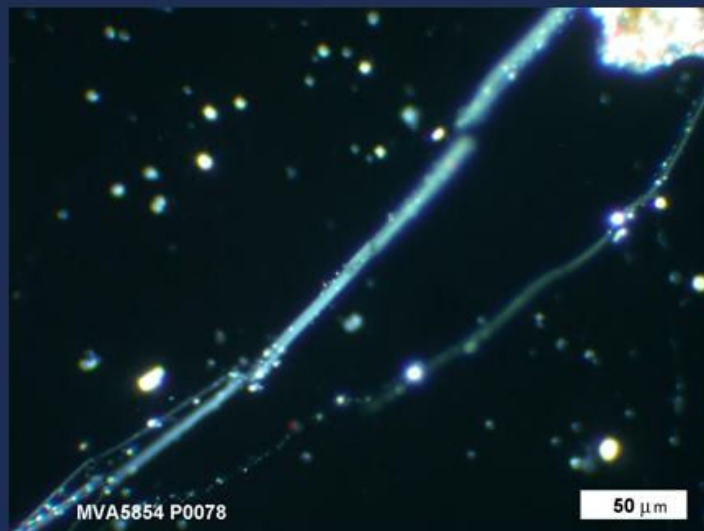


4. Misbet "powder clay" ("Mineralizador") – contains anthophyllite asbestos (amphibole) and chrysotile ("white" asbestos)–(both less than 1%).

## MINERALIZADOR MISBET ANFIBÓLIO (ANTOFILITA)



## MINERALIZADOR MISBET AMIANTO CRISOTILA



5. **“Campestre” mineral water** – tests conducted in accordance with United States’ legislated standards showed no trace of asbestos of any size in the samples collected.

Considering that the use and application of amphibole asbestos is prohibited under national legislation<sup>2</sup>, the presence of such hazardous material in these products is of grave concern. A factual report was sent to ANVISA – the national agency that monitors compliance of essential healthcare products with hygiene standards – and to the Federal Public Ministry proposing an immediate stop in the production, marketing and trade of all MISBET’s products (ointment cream, powdered clay “Mineralizador”, salt). Also proposed was that a new analysis be conducted on the Campestre mineral water so that all doubt about it containing asbestos fibers can be removed.

The day after I conducted this field survey (on 1 December 2003) in Jaramataia, State of Alagoas, I was suspended and prohibited from inspecting any cases outside the State of São Paulo. Two memos issued by the Department of Health and Safety, Rules in the Workplace – DSST – under reference n°. 590 and 593, gave no administrative or technical reason for this punishment. These administrative handcuffs were later ratified by an official memo reference n°. 613 dated 12 December 2003. They remain in place today despite the fact that we have requested an enquiry be carried out to investigate the reasons for such drastic and unwarranted actions. The production and use of MISBET products continue.

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<sup>2</sup> The Law 9.055/95 which “controls the extraction, industrialization, trade and transport of asbestos and products that contain it, as well the natural and artificial fibers, from any origin, used for the same goals” in the 1st article prohibits throughout the country “**the extraction, production, industrialization, utilization and commercialization of actinolite, amosite (brown asbestos), anthophyllite, crocidolite (blue asbestos) and tremolite, mineral types belonging to the amphibole groups, as well the products containing these mineral substances**”.