

Community Action

For the first time in Asia, a small community, residing in a rubber estate has mobilized itself to prevent the demolition of asbestos roofed homes lying vacant there. Thanks to social workers and the fact that there had been publicity in the media, this small community has been sensitized to the dangers of asbestos.

There are about 15 Indian families who live in Changkat Salak Estate in the State of Perak. Members of this family used to work in the rubber plantations and they go back three generations.

From the year 2000, these former workers have been sent eviction notices, simply because they do not work in the estate anymore.

Some of the families afraid of defying the eviction notices, moved away while others, with no place to go, stood their ground.

In the meantime, the management sent in a demolition team to tear down the vacant houses, all of which had asbestos roofs.

On 10th February 2003, without any prior notice, a demolition team comprising 4 men was sent by the management of Changkat Salak Estate to tear down the houses standing vacant.

Knowing that the tearing down of these homes with asbestos roofing could do irreparable harm to their health, some of the former workers pleaded with the demolition team not to tear down the houses, but they refused to listen to their pleas and continued with their demolition work.

With scant regard to the health of the families and their own, the demolition team tore down the houses using sledgehammers. Some of the asbestos roofs were removed intact while many others were simply torn down and fell to the ground, shattering to pieces and sending asbestos dust and fibres flying into the air.

The families here had put up makeshift signs to say that the area was dangerous and they also cordoned the place with line tapes to so as to prevent the children from venturing into this area.

On 12th February 2003, the former workers, now desperate, physically prevented the demolition squad from tearing down the houses and succeeded in making them stop work. The former workers then made a police report. The leaders were detained for half a day by the police. Legal intervention was required to secure release.

The management decided to negotiate with the workers. The health authorities were involved by social workers in the dispute. The health officer indeed confirmed that the roofing's were asbestos. Demolition was stalled.

CAP made a representation to DOSH and we succeeded in preventing further demolition. The area was cordoned off by the estate workers.

Negotiations are still continuing. The situation remains the same till date with the area collecting weeds and undergrowth. The area has still not been cleared of the asbestos debris.









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