

**Open Letter to Prime Minister Helen Clark
Friday April 28 2006**

Re: Asbestos Campaign Launched Today.



NEW ZEALAND COUNCIL OF TRADE UNIONS
Te Kauae Kaimahi

Dear Prime Minister,

On Workers Memorial Day today we are launching a campaign for sufferers of asbestos related diseases.

Asbestos has had a variety of uses in New Zealand and was used widely in buildings from the 1930s until 1991. Fletchers and James Hardies were the main importers of asbestos and asbestos products.

The potentially lethal nature of asbestos fibres has been known for centuries but credible international research has been available since at least the early 1960s. Yet New Zealand workers continued to be exposed to asbestos, right through the 60s, 70s and 80s.

Through no fault of their own, hundreds of New Zealand workers have suffered the painful and terminal effects of lung cancer, asbestosis and mesothelioma through their exposure to asbestos related products.

It is estimated that about 150 New Zealanders will die from asbestos-related diseases every year for the next 20-30 years. Although it is acknowledged that the diseases resulted from workplace exposures, lump sum compensation is denied under the Accident Compensation Scheme unless the exposure continued after 1 April 2002.

Fairness, and international labour conventions, require that these asbestos disease victims should be entitled to lump sum compensation, and I understand that this is acknowledged by Government. The reason which has been given for denying this fair compensation is the cost to ACC of doing so.

The CTU strongly asserts that, if cost is an issue, companies like Hardies and Fletchers, which created the hazard, should pay the extra levies to ACC to fund fair compensation for asbestos disease victims.

The Social Contract on which ACC is founded promised real compensation in exchange for the immunity from legal action at common law which companies like Hardies and Fletchers continue to enjoy in New Zealand. Those companies should not also be protected from levies to fund fair compensation to the victims of their inexcusable disregard of available scientific evidence.

And that is why we have launched our campaign today to build public support for changes to the ACC scheme to make sure that they do.

The CTU urges the Government to urgently **amend the law** covering ACC to enable for lump sum payments to be able to be made to asbestos victims and, if necessary to impose **a special levy on** Fletchers and James Hardies so that those companies which profited from the use of asbestos bear the cost of doing so.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ross Wilson'.

Ross Wilson,
President,
NZ Council of Trade Unions

