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June 20, 2016

The Honourable Kent Hehr
Minister of Veterans Affairs
Veterans Affairs Canada
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0P4

Dear Minister Hehr,

Re: Asbestos in Navy Ships

I am writing on behalf of constituents and naval veterans across Canada to bring to your attention the history of asbestos exposure that has plagued many who served in the Royal Canadian Navy.

Before the dangers of asbestos were widely known, this toxic mineral was commonly found aboard navy ships, as it was a great insulator and resistant to fire. Many of our veterans worked in the engine and boiler rooms where asbestos was commonly used and disturbed during routine operations. As I am sure you are aware, extended exposure can lead to an accumulation of asbestos fibers in lung tissues. Those who have been exposed to asbestos can live for many years without symptoms; it can take years for the disease to manifest itself. The conditions associated with asbestos exposure can get worse over time, and many of our naval veterans are falling ill with chronic lung conditions.

I have learned of veterans who have health complications related to exposure to hazardous material including asbestos and who have been denied assistance or have experienced difficulty accessing benefits from Veterans Affairs. My colleagues and I believe that the Government of Canada should review the applications and outstanding grievances of veterans who have been exposed to hazardous materials, including asbestos, and see where benefits and services can be applied.

Veterans in the UK and Australia are receiving benefits for asbestos exposure. In the US many of those with asbestos-related diseases have been successful in receiving settlements from their employers.

We now know how dangerous asbestos exposure is and what the corresponding health conditions are. Today necessary steps are taken to ensure asbestos is handled safely by reliable asbestos-abatement companies. With this knowledge we need to take care of those who served our country in previous decades. No veteran should fall through the cracks.

My NDP colleagues and I would appreciate it if you can review the current asbestos claims policy and the files of veterans known to have served in areas of high risk to asbestos exposure to ensure our country is living up to its solemn service covenant with veterans.

I appreciate your time in this matter and look forward to your reply.

Yours Sincerely,



Alistair MacGregor, MP
Cowichan Malahat Langford

cc: Irene Mathysen, MP
Constituents

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