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ASBESTOS VICTIMS SUPPORT GROUP FORUM

The Leader of the Opposition, Sir Keir Starmer
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

21st July 2023

Open letter to the Leader of the Opposition, Sir Keir Starmer

Dear Sir Keir,

I am writing on behalf of the Asbestos Victims Support Groups Forum UK. We give voice to the thousands of people who have fallen ill, or lost loved ones, through exposure to asbestos.

We have some of the worst rates of asbestos disease in the world. Mesothelioma, an under-researched cancer caused by asbestos, killed 2,268 people in Great Britain in 2021.

Many people in the UK were exposed to Cape's asbestos products. We believe there is now incontrovertible evidence that Cape hid the true dangers of its asbestos products from the public and regulators.

Had the true dangers been known, we believe safety measures would have been made tougher, and a ban on asbestos brought in much sooner. We believe Cape's actions cost many lives.

Though Cape no longer manufactures asbestos products, it is still trading, and is now owned by Altrad. We have been calling on Altrad to donate £10 million to mesothelioma research.

A substantial donation to research would atone for what Cape did a generation ago. It would allow researchers a chance to find new treatments for this terminal cancer that blights so many lives.

We hope that Altrad will eventually do the right thing. Yet we remain concerned that Altrad, and its subsidiaries, are still being awarded major public contracts before this matter has been settled. Recently Altrad were awarded a £30.8 million contract by Magnox Ltd, for decommissioning & asbestos removal at Berkeley Power Station in Gloucestershire.

A generation ago, Cape profited from asbestos. Today, Altrad is being given taxpayer money for asbestos removal. This cannot be right. It cannot be allowed to continue. Thousands still die from asbestos disease every year.

We ask for a moratorium on any new public contracts being awarded to Altrad, and its subsidiaries, until Altrad's moral obligation to donate £10 million to mesothelioma research has been met.

Yours faithfully, Mr Rob Rayner, Chair, Asbestos Victims Support Groups Forum UK