

South Africa Set To Implement Ban, Phase Out Asbestos Products

JOHANNESBURG, South Africa — The South African government announced June 21 that it is set to ban the manufacture and use of asbestos-containing products in the country in legislation slated to be passed by the end of 2004, sources told Mealey Publications.

The sources said that in a parliamentary press briefing by South African Environmental Minister Marthinus van Schalkwyk, the minister reported that for certain products with no current alternatives, a phasing out of the use of asbestos in those products will take place over the next three to five years and that no more asbestos products will be allowed to be manufactured in the country. According to sources, Schalkwyk said the ban will be promulgated by legislation due before parliament by the end of the year.

The sources said oxyacetylene cylinders, seals, gaskets and brake linings will be the products that will be most affected by the ban. The phasing in of asbestos-free alternatives for other products has already begun, the sources said.

The report of the asbestos ban by the South African government was not well received by officials from Zimbabwe, who depend on South African foreign currency from its asbestos exports, the sources said. Zimbabwean Foreign Minister Stan Mudenge was reported in June to say that Zimbabwe's government will spare no efforts to ensure the survival of the Shabanie-Mashaba Mines asbestos mine group and called the mine group "a strategic national asset that we cannot allow to be closed," the sources said. Mudenge reported that a ban by South Africa or in any other neighboring country will not deter Zimbabwe's direction of supporting asbestos, such a potentially lucrative industry for the country, the sources said.

Sources say the Shabanie-Mashaba Mines will produce 175,000 tons of chrysotile asbestos this year. ■