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Canada, others block asbestos from U.N. hazardous list

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GENEVA (Reuters) - Chrysotile asbestos will not be listed as a hazardous industrial chemical that can be banned from import after countries including Canada and Ukraine blocked consensus, a United Nations spokesman said Friday.

The decision was taken at a meeting of states that have ratified the Rotterdam Convention despite the treaty's scientific review body having recommended the inclusion of "white" asbestos on health grounds, a U.N. spokesman said.

"Several countries declared in plenary problems they had with the inclusion of chrysotile (asbestos), including Canada, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Vietnam," U.N. spokesman Michael Stanley-Jones told a news briefing in Geneva.

Australia, Chile and the European Union (EU) were among those seeking the inclusion of chrysotile on the 2004 treaty's trade "watch list" of chemicals and severely hazardous pesticides which exporters must share information on.

"That chemical will come before the next conference of the Rotterdam parties in 2013," the spokesman said.

Endosulfan, a pesticide banned in many states but still used in many tropical countries on crops including coffee and tea, was added by consensus, he said. So were two other pesticides, alachlor and aldicarb, bringing the total list to 43 substances.

Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper, in his successful campaign for the May 2 general election, sought votes in Quebec and defended one of the province's most controversial exports -- asbestos.

Health and public safety groups had been pressuring the federal and Quebec governments to halt exports of asbestos, a fire-retardant mineral used in construction that is linked to deadly lung diseases, including cancer.

Supporters of Quebec's chrysotile asbestos industry say that this form of the mineral is safe to handle as long as proper guidelines are followed.

Critics have been particularly concerned about exports to developing countries that lack the safeguards to ensure asbestos is used safely, endangering the lives of both workers using the material and the general public.

(Reporting by [Stephanie Nebehay](#); editing by [Elizabeth Piper](#))

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