

Infrastructure Canada's Response to Environmental Petition No. 470: Assessing Effectiveness of Regulation of Asbestos and Asbestos Cement Pipes in Canada.

The following outlines Infrastructure Canada's responses to Environmental Petition No. 470: Assessing Effectiveness of Regulation of Asbestos and Asbestos Cement Pipes in Canada.

Question 4: When announcing the measures to ban asbestos and asbestos-containing products, the government stated, “There are no significant health risks if asbestos fibres are enclosed or tightly bound, in good condition, and left undisturbed.” Ongoing, long-term water flow erodes and weakens old asbestos cement pipes. CELA and PCN ask for the details for ongoing monitoring of pipes and of drinking water quality undertaken across Canada, to assess whether asbestos is “enclosed or tightly bound, in good condition, and left undisturbed” and is not entering drinking water supplies? What is the incidence of failure of these pipes in across jurisdictions? Does failure result in increased water contamination, and/or residues in water mains, and how is this detected and remediated? What measures are taken to protect workers’, bystanders’ and environmental health when replacing intact or collapsed AC pipes, and how is asbestos containment verified?

Pipe failure could result in increased asbestos in drinking water. There could also be an increase in asbestos fibers released into drinking water following intrusive construction or repair operations on asbestos-cement piping. The provision of drinking water services and related monitoring of drinking water quality is within the direct purview of provincial and territorial governments and municipalities as their delivery agents. INFC does not monitor this information, nor does it require monitoring of this information for the assets it funds or offer funding to monitor water quality or condition of pipes.

During the replacement of asbestos-cement pipes, all provinces and territories have occupational health and safety legislation that applies to workplaces within their jurisdiction, as well as a set of acceptable limits for airborne asbestos fibres in those workplaces. Provinces and territories also have measures in place to protect bystanders in the vicinity of construction zones. In addition, the Canada Labour Code specifies limits of acceptable concentrations of all forms of asbestos fibres allowed in the air in federal buildings.

As per the petition, I understand that a response to this question will also be provided on behalf of Health Canada, by the Honourable Jean-Yves Duclos, Minister of Health.

Question 13: According to the NRC and Energy, Mines and Resources Canada, many more AC water pipes were installed in Western Canada, as opposed to Central Canada and Eastern Canada. Please provide the status of AC pipes in use across the country. Why were AC pipes used more frequently in Western Canada compared to other regions in Canada?

INFC does not hold the information requested, nor was it involved in the initial studies noted. While INFC provides financial support to provinces, territories and communities in relation to drinking water systems, project-level decisions concerning drinking water treatment and distribution technologies and materials are made by the responsible communities.

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Question 14: Canada announced that it is conducting a National Infrastructure Assessment to create a credible source of data and evidence on Canada's key infrastructure needs. The last federal review of AC pipes was conducted in 1977, 45 years ago. Will the National Infrastructure Assessment gather updated data on the amount, condition, and location of AC pipes? If so, please provide details. If not, why not?

The federal government remains committed to launching Canada's first ever National Infrastructure Assessment. It will be a foundational tool for infrastructure decision-makers across Canada to support the identification of needs and priorities in the built environment towards a net-zero emissions future.

While the issue of asbestos in water pipes could be an issue that is touched on as part of a National Infrastructure Assessment once it is launched, data collection on the amount and location of AC pipes in Canada is currently being addressed through Canada's Core Public Infrastructure (CCPI) survey.

Since 2016, Infrastructure Canada has been proactive in gathering data on Canada's core public infrastructure assets. The CCPI survey is conducted by Statistics Canada, on behalf of Infrastructure Canada, on a bi-annual basis. The questionnaire is sent to governments of all levels (municipal, provincial, territorial and federal) that own or lease public infrastructure, to collect data on the stock, condition, and performance of Canada's core public infrastructure assets.

The next CCPI survey release will be in late 2024. Throughout 2021 and 2022, Infrastructure Canada undertook an extensive outreach process to improve the survey. As a result of the outreach process, the next survey will include a question on asbestos in water:

- What was the total length in kilometres of asbestos cement water pipes as of December 31, 2022?

Towards the end of 2024, we expect to release data from CCPI 2022, subject to an evaluation of its fitness for use. More information about the survey can be found on the survey at www.statcan.gc.ca/ccpi.

For more information on Infrastructure Canada's mandate, please consult the following source: <https://www.infrastructure.gc.ca/about-apropos/index-eng.html#1.2>

For aspects outside of Infrastructure Canada's mandate, I understand that responses to your questions will also be addressed by the Honourable Omar Alghabra, Minister of Transport; the Honourable Steven Guilbeault, Minister of Environment and Climate Change; the Honourable François-Philippe Champagne, Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry; the Honourable Helena Jaczek, Minister of Public Services and Procurement; and, the Honourable Jean-Yves Duclos, Minister of Health.