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Releases

Court decision underlines need for immediate action on asbestos removal regulation: BCFED

(Unceded Squamish, Tsleil-Waututh and Musqueam territories — Vancouver, BC) Laird Cronk, president of the BC Federation of Labour, released the following statement today in response to news of a BC Court of Appeal decision upholding the Workers' Compensation Board's actions against Mike Singh and Seattle Environmental, including a permanent ban from performing asbestos abatement work:

This is welcome news. No employer should be cutting corners on safety and endangering workers — especially when we're dealing with a substance as deadly as asbestos.

This news also underlines just how urgently we need action from the BC government to protect workers and the public. Asbestos remains the number one killer of BC workers, responsible for well over 1,000 work-related deaths in the last two decades. And asbestos-abatement workers are particularly vulnerable: often young, inexperienced and — far too frequently — untrained.

There isn't any question about what's needed. The government has already done extensive consultation, resulting in its own report from late 2018. That report, Keeping Workers, the Public and the Environment Safe From Asbestos, sets out specific multi-ministerial recommendations on three fronts:

- licensing asbestos-removal companies, so we can get rid of bad actors;
- training for asbestos-removal workers, so they have the know-how to do their jobs safely and recognize dangerous conditions;
- and better asbestos disposal methods, so we're all better protected from this lethal toxic substance.

While it's critical that there are consequences for flagrant safety violations, taking one rule-breaking employer out of the sector isn't enough. History has shown us there will be others ready and willing to put more workers in danger of a lingering, painful, deadly disease.

Changes are overdue. The government has the recommendations it needs in hand. It's a question of taking action now to safeguard the health of every one of these workers.