



Defending the Indefensible: The Global Asbestos Industry and its Fight for Survival

By Jock McCulloch, Geoffrey Tweedale

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In the early twentieth century, asbestos had a reputation as a lifesaver. In 1960, however, it became known that even relatively brief exposure to asbestos can cause mesothelioma, a virulent and lethal cancer.

Yet the bulk of the world's asbestos was mined after 1960. Asbestos usage in many countries continued unabated.

This is the first global history of how the asbestos industry and its allies in government, insurance, and medicine defended the product throughout the twentieth century. It explains how mining and manufacture could continue despite overwhelming medical evidence as to the risks. The argument advanced in this book is that asbestos has proved so enduring because the industry was able to mount a successful defense strategy for the mineral - a strategy that still operates in some parts of the world. This defence involved the shaping of the public debate by censoring, and sometimes corrupting, scientific research, nurturing scientific uncertainty, and using allies in government, insurance, and medicine.

The book also discusses the problems of asbestos in the environment, compensating victims, and the continued use of asbestos in the developing world. Its global focus shows how asbestos can be seen as a model for many occupational diseases - indeed for a whole range of hazards produced by industrial societies. The book is based on a wealth of documentary material gained from legal discovery, supplemented by evidence from the authors' visits and researches in the US, the UK, Canada, Kazakhstan, Zimbabwe, Australia, Swaziland, and South Africa.

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Editorial Review

Review

"[A] fascinating and thoughtful study of the asbestos industry...a valuable addition to an already large literature. By globalizing the asbestos story, the authors reveal the tactics that have protected the industry for decades from sustained, intense criticism, and they clarify the challenges that remain in defending the victims whose lives have been irreparably damaged and in protecting us all from the threat of future injuries by this industry."--*Business History Review*

About the Author

Jock McCulloch and Geoffrey Tweedale are historians with long-term research interests in health, corporate history, and mining. They have published widely on the history of industrial hazards. They have written three books on the asbestos industry covering manufacture and mining in the UK, South Africa, and Australia.

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