

Free Webinar

UKATA

Global Asbestos Justice: A Case Against Eternit



Tuesday
27th January 2026



Time
2:00PM - 3:00PM

In collaboration with:



Global
Asbestos
Forum

Presenter:

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Foundation*





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Global justice: a fight against Eternit

On the menu for this webinar:

- About the Global Asbestos Forum
- About Eternit and ETEX (1995)
- Eternit criminal prosecutions and developments in:
 - Italy
 - Netherlands
 - Brazil





About the Global Asbestos Forum

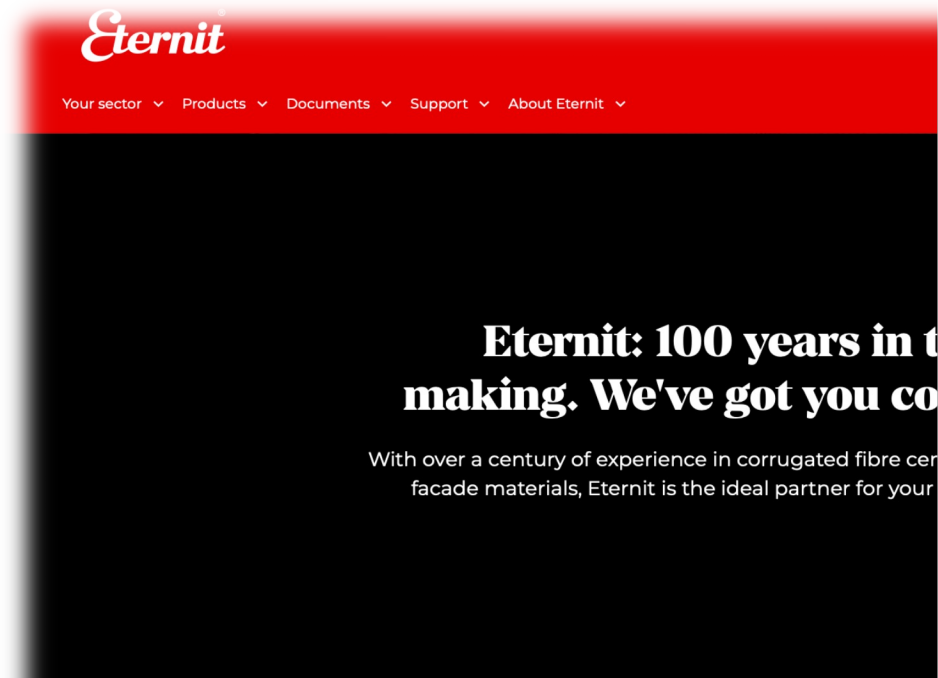
- Founded in 2014 (European Asbestos Forum)
- The main goal: preventing new asbestos victims by making the very best knowledge available to asbestos professionals of every background, across the globe.
- Renamed Global Asbestos Forum in 2024 (26 countries from six continents represented!)
- Presently looking forward to its 9th global conference (or is it the 10th?)
- Participates in all kinds of conferences and scientific projects, advises media, etc.





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Eternit: We've got you covered



Eternit sheets

Eternit has been producing fibre cement sheets over a century. With specialist knowledge across a full range of agricultural buildings - from dairy, beef, pigs, poultry and equestrian, to warehouses for storage – we offer a range of profiled sheeting to suit all applications.

[Read more](#)

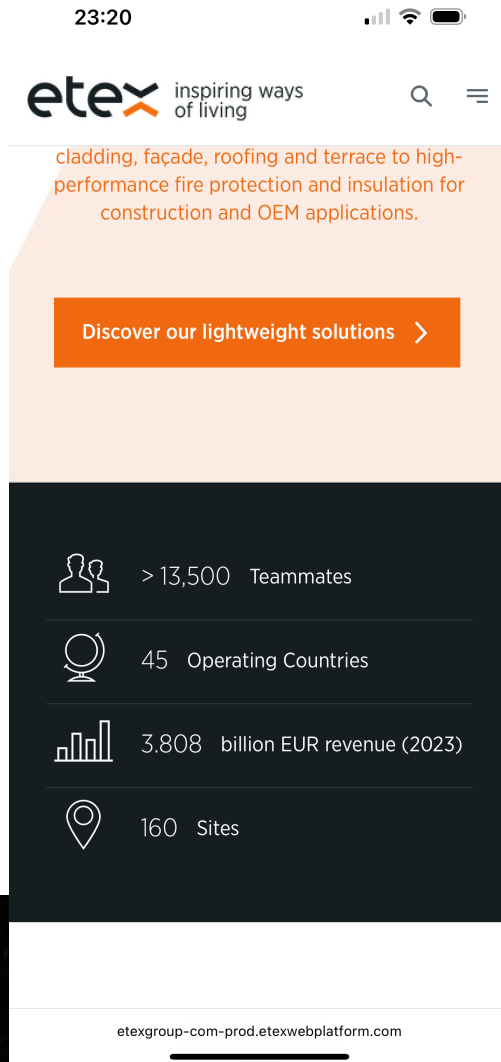
About Eternit

Eternit has been producing fibre cement profiled sheeting **for over a century**. With specialist knowledge of roof requirements across a full range of agricultural buildings - from dairy, beef, pigs, poultry and equestrian, to warehouses for storage – we offer a range of profiled sheeting to suit all applications. With all its tradition, **Eternit is a reliable partner to farmers**, helping them to manage their future successfully and sustainably. We are committed to **creating value** for the owner of a building, **ensuring durability and protecting animal welfare**.





Eternit: a global corporate octopus



Twenty years ago, I tried to figure out the corporate structure of Eternit/ETEX/SAMA/other brand names. It is so vast, so complicated, this is quite impossible to do.

According to its own website, ETEX (formerly Eternit) is established in 45 countries over the world. It earns about *3,8 billion euros a year*.





Stephan Schmidheiny: a short portrait I

- Son of the Swiss founder, co-owner of the Eternit corporation and director of the Northern Italian factories, including the factory in Casale Monferrato. Born in 1947 (78 years old now).
- In his first meeting as director with the international directors, he informed the international directors bluntly about the considerable health dangers, instructed them to shut up and keep going. He was responsible as CEO for the horrific work conditions in his factories.
- Multi-billionaire
- Received an honorary degree from Yale in 1996, for being one of the world's most environmentally conscientious business leaders: for instance, by replacing asbestos with alternatives in his products. Between 1996 and 1997, Schmidheiny's foundation Avina made multiple donations to Yale.
- His spokesperson Elisabeth Meyerhans Sarasin describes him as follows: "Stephan Schmidheiny is regarded worldwide as a pioneer who implemented the safest possible methods for asbestos processing." "His responsible industrial activities prevented thousands of people from contracting an asbestos-related disease."





Stephan Schmidheiny: a short portrait II

Schmidheiny has been frank about his contempt for the Italian victims and for the Italian justice system. He stated to the Wall Street Journal in 2002:

“I promise you, I will never go to an Italian prison. Once in a while, I have to look myself in the mirror. I can very well look this guy in the eyes and feel good about what I have done. Of course, nobody is perfect, and from hindsight, you always know more and you should have done more.”

He has never attended any of the very many court hearings to look his accusers in the eye, preferring to stay at his home in Switzerland.





Eternit: the Italian trials ‘Uno’ and ‘Bis’ I

First trial (‘Uno’) against Schmidheiny:

- Started in 2009. Convicted in Turin in 2012 for three thousand asbestos related deaths in the Casale Monferrato factory and town, in two instances, sentenced to enormous damages to civil parties and 16 years in prison for criminal negligence and causing an environmental disaster.
- In appeal, Schmidheiny was sentenced to 18 years and 90 million euros damages, but many deaths were already past the period of limitation.
- Supreme Court in Rome overturned the last verdict (appeal) on a technicality in 2014.





Eternit: the Italian trials II

Some things that came to light at the first trial round ('Uno'):

- The asbestos dust in the Casale Monferrato factory was so heavy, that people would be unable to recognise each other.
- In the Second World War, the Allied pilots would recognise the town by the big white cloud hanging over it.
- Unionists were given the dustiest jobs.
- Schmidheiny was aware that, due to the terrible labour conditions, 'some people' would die from them. But he could not know who *and accepted this*.
- The staff would have bbq's on a beach next to the factory, which was made of asbestos waste.





Eternit: the Italian trials III

The Epstein files: apparently, Epstein was involved in lobbying in Rome for the ‘Uno’ Schmidheiny conviction to be thrown out by the Italian Supreme Court on a technicality. The same day that this indeed happened, there was a message of thanks for ‘services provided’ by a long-time right-hand man of Stephan Schmidheiny.

I did not go to Rome, to attend the verdict and the street party that was planned to be held after the verdict of the Supreme Court. Not for a minute did I think, realistically, that the case would be won in the end, no matter how justified and righteous.





Eternit: the Italian trials

Second trial ('Bis') against Schmidheiny, to 'fix' the 'technical issue', with new asbestos victims (on account of short limitation):

- 7 June 2023: Schmidheiny is sentenced to 12,5 years jail and damages for manslaughter at the courthouse in Novara.
- 17 April 2025: Schmidheiny is considered guilty again of manslaughter at the Court of Assizes in Novara and sentenced to 9,5 years and damages. Back to the Supreme Court again!

THE COURT OF APPEAL OF ASSIZES

No. 5/2024 R.G. ASSAPP

**ITALIAN REPUBLIC
IN THE NAME OF THE ITALIAN PEOPLE**

THE 1ST COURT OF APPEAL OF ASSIZES OF TURIN

has pronounced the following

JUDGMENT

in the criminal proceedings

AGAINST

Schmidheiny Stephan Ernst

appealing against the judgment of the Court of Assizes of
Novara dated 7 June 2023

given Articles 605, 521, 529 and 530 of the Code of Criminal
Procedure,

partially revoke the appealed judgment,

acquits Schmidheiny Stephan Ernst of the crime of manslaughter
against

66. ALESSIO Ferdinando

74. BALLARO' Salvatrice

107. CARENZO Pierangela I

20. COSTANZO Luigia

136. DONNA Luigi

138. DUSIO Primo



Eternit: the Italian trials IV

Some things that came to light at the second trial round ('Bis'):

- A professor defending Schmidheiny argued that workers could already have been exposed to asbestos as a baby in their cribs, so their fate was already decided and Schmidheiny merely gave them jobs. Their extreme exposure in the factory was therefor immaterial to causation.
- He also stated that asbestos cement products would start releasing fibres the moment they left the factory gates; and he argued that Schmidheiny could not be blamed for any such exposure.
- Every day, somebody is diagnosed with mesothelioma in Casale Monferrato; and every day, somebody dies from it.





Eternit in the Netherlands I

Eternit started a large asbestos cement factory in the Dutch town of Goor, in the east of the Netherlands in 1937. In its heyday, it employed 800 workers.

Trade unionists have told me that the labour conditions there were beyond horrific.

The factory only switched to making non-asbestos products on the day that the Dutch asbestos ban became active: 1 July 1993.



Suddenly, the very first day of the asbestos ban, it was possible to make asbestos-free cement products.





Eternit in the Netherlands II

For decades, the Eternit factory would allow municipalities, farmers, anybody with a truck to take away damaged, unsold products. They would typically crush them with tractors and the like on farm yards and country roads, where people would drive and bicycle every day.

These private and public roads have had to be cleaned up at enormous expense. Eternit has always refused to contribute a single penny to the costs.



Not surprisingly, this area is considered to be a geographical 'hot spot' for mesothelioma.





Eternit in the Netherlands III

In 2012, the Court in The Hague decided that Eternit should be considered to be “a producer that is part of an internationally operating group”. As such, the company could have actively informed itself of the scientifically well known risks relating to asbestos.

Over the years, the Court of Rotterdam has consistently established that Eternit could, and should, have warned customers and consumers about the use of asbestos for a long time, at least since 1969. For instance, by using warning labels. These were heavily resisted by Eternit.

Courtcases against Eternit were often a very long procedure. Settlements included a gag clause.





Eternit: the Dutch criminal trial coming up I

During decades, the Eternit factory in Goor would import huge amounts of asbestos yearly and turn them into lucrative asbestos cement products, then sell them all over the country. Knowing at the very latest as of 1969 that asbestos fibres are carcinogenic. As a result, undoubtedly many tens of thousands have lost their lives to the exposure of these products, workers and consumers alike; and as many and more in the future, too.

Dutch lawyer Bob Ruers has qualified the situation as “*manslaughter on an industrial scale*”.

On 17 June 2025, the Dutch Public Prosecutor announced that it would prosecute Eternit for three cases of manslaughter and death by negligence for three dead mesothelioma victims. NB: the company, not the directors. So nobody will go to jail for this. Nobody will ever be held personally responsible for the dreadful decisions that were made to enrich Eternit at the cost of so many human lives.





Eternit: the Dutch criminal trial coming up II

What is Eternit saying in its defence? Its lawyer, professor Daan Doorenbos, wrote a letter to the Public Prosecutor. He explained why Eternit is quite innocent of the charges of corporate manslaughter and death by negligence.

1. Eternit acted within the law, as asbestos was not prohibited before 1994.
2. If you act within the law, you cannot be held criminally responsible retro-actively.
3. Any charges must have passed the period of limitation (usually 20 years)

Easy counter arguments:

1. Eternit knew of the dangers much better and earlier than the Dutch legislator and cultivated (or abused) its position in The Hague to protect its interests. It knew of the dangers, therefore it had a duty of care as an employer to act accordingly.
2. The period of limitation only starts when the deaths occur.





ETEX: so responsible and correct these days... or is it?

For decades now, Eternit/ETEX has made the world believe that it now recognises the carcinogenicity of asbestos. Hence its change from asbestos cement to non-asbestos cement products and green technologies from approximately 2004. It has distanced itself of its odious history. So, it is now entirely respectable...

But is that the truth?





ETEX in Brazil, 2026: fighting in court to keep the asbestos mine open II

In Brazil, a subsidiary of Eternit S.A./ETEX, called SAMA MINERAÇÃO DE AMIANTO LTDA, has been fighting in court for years to keep the **Cana Brava mine** in Minaçu open for mining, processing and transporting the asbestos for export purposes – despite the Brazilian asbestos ban of 2017 and a Supreme Court ruling, also of 2017. It is still one of the biggest chrysotile mines in the world and exports mainly to Asian countries.





ETEX in Brazil: fighting in court to keep the asbestos mine open II

Some of the dangers of mining asbestos:

- For the miners
- For the miners' families
- For the people living in the vicinity
- For the persons in the transport chain
- For the people in the traffic...
- For the consumers
- For the professionals
- For the removers
- For the environment
- For the workers in the factories, their families, the people in those vicinities...
- For the end consumers. It just goes on and on.

See this news item, source: IBAS 4 May 2022 →

On April 24, 2022 a truck carrying 30 tonnes of asbestos fiber from Brazil's SAMA³ chrysotile (white) asbestos mine in Minaçu, Goiás collided with two other vehicles on the way to the Port of Paranaguá on the coast of Paraná. The truck operated by Rodojunior Logística e Transportes (Rodojunior Logistics and Transport, also known as JNR Logistics) careered off the São José bridge discharging its cargo on the hillside and in the river below.⁴ The 36-year old truck driver was killed and two other people were injured in the collision on the BR-153 highway which involved another cargo vehicle and a passenger car.⁵ The truck had travelled 800 kilometers from the mine and had nearly 1,000 kilometers left on its journey to the port where its cargo was scheduled for export.





Some final thoughts. Restorative justice?

The asbestos industry is still going strong in big parts of the world.

In the Western part of the world, it is fighting tooth and nail against liability, denying culpability, dragging courtcases out, silencing victims.

It is estimated that Stephan Schmidheiny's legal team costs him approximately ten million euros yearly. He's been prosecuted since 2009.

There are suggestions for 'restorative justice' – rather than jailing him, let Schmidheiny put some part of his billions towards finding a cure. My question to you all: what do you think of this idea?





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Last but not least. It's a very small foundation and a big world out there... You can help.

Every year, the Global Asbestos Forum travels [thousands of miles, sometimes tens of thousands of miles...](#) Bringing asbestos awareness, knowledge, science and networking where it is needed, bringing global asbestos professionals together. Its ultimate aim: preventing new victims. It's a heavy burden to carry.

The foundation has big plans to accelerate asbestos awareness, to *really* make a difference globally. Will you please consider helping it along a bit?

You can [donate directly](#) to the foundation's bank account; but if you prefer to be invoiced, let me know... IBAN number [NL23 RABO 0300 652 305](#).





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Thank you for your attention.

Please connect with me on LinkedIn, if
you haven't already!

You can always reach me for
questions at

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