



To: The News Editor

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For Immediate Release

## **NWC STATEMENT RE ASBESTOS-CEMENT PIPES**

In the interest of better public understanding and to clarify certain media reports, the National Water Commission (NWC) wishes to share the following information regarding its work with Asbestos Cement (AC) pipes.

Asbestos Cement (AC) pipes are pipes made primarily from cement with a small percent of asbestos – a naturally occurring mineral – added to make them stronger, more durable, fire-resistant, chemical-resistant, friction-absorbing and flexible. Asbestos is a naturally occurring mineral. Although its use has been reduced over recent years, it is still widely used in many products and applications.

Studies by the World Health Organization (WHO) and others **have consistently shown no link** between the use of Asbestos Cement pipes in drinking water systems and lung or gastrointestinal cancers. As a result, these pipes continue to be used in water supply systems in Jamaica and around the world, including Canada and the USA.

However, at the same time, it has been shown that the inhalation of certain types of asbestos fibres (and especially types different from that used in water pipes) do indeed contribute to the development of lung cancer. This may occur mainly from the release

of these particular types of asbestos fibres into the air, especially in enclosed spaces during the mining and manufacturing processes, and the inhalation of large quantities of these fibres over many years.

This has contributed to much public concern and often misunderstanding. In the case of Jamaica and the National Water Commission, it is to be noted that none of the risk factors indicated above apply to our use of Asbestos Cement pipes in drinking water. To be clear, no customer of the National Water Commission is in any way endangered by the use of Asbestos Cement in their water supply system. **There is therefore no need for alarm.**

Notwithstanding, the National Water Commission's policy is to use new Asbestos Cement pipes only in sewerage systems and to replace those existing in water supply systems whenever they are broken and where water losses are high as part of Non-Revenue Water (NRW) reduction efforts.

In addition, the NWC is well aware that while water workers are not included on the lists of professions with highest exposure risks, there is - however negligible - a risk to NWC workers working with Asbestos Cement pipes. Therefore, out of an abundance of caution the NWC has established safety procedures for working with Asbestos Cement pipes.

This involves use of the internationally recognized wet method, steps to keep the pipes "non-friable" plus the use of appropriate respiratory and safety gear as stipulated by NWC policies and NWC safety experts.

In the case of the emergency repairs to 18" nominal diameter Asbestos Cement trunk main along Mandela Highway, the emergency repair crew did employ the appropriate wet method, had taken steps to reduce breakage to the pipe and to keep the pipes "non-friable". However, in their haste to advance the repairs, they had started the work without being fully outfitted with all the relevant safety apparatus.

These were subsequently delivered on site and were used in the completion of the emergency repairs to the critical transmission pipe within a mere 36 hours of the break occurring.

There is no need or requirement for the engagement of external agents in treating with routine repairs to Asbestos Cement pipes by the Commission.

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