



## ALEC's San Diego gathering an insult to Navy veterans dying of asbestos exposure

American Legislative Exchange Council, backed by the Koch brothers, pushed bill to limit legal rights of veterans and others exposed to asbestos

**SACRAMENTO (July 21, 2015)** – This week's meeting of the American Legislative Exchange Council and its corporate backers in San Diego has regional reverberations given the city's status as home to a major U.S. Navy port as well as a burgeoning military veteran population. Earlier this year, ALEC ignited a bid to pass legislation in California designed to dramatically limit the legal rights of Navy veterans and others dying as a result of exposure to asbestos.

AB 597, authored by Assemblyman Ken Cooley (D-Rancho Cordova), threatened to add expensive and time-consuming legal hurdles for military veterans and other victims of asbestos-related diseases grappling with terminal illness while racing the clock to resolve legal cases before they die.

"This bill inspired by ALEC remains a clear and present danger to the right of many veterans who served our country only to face the peacetime threat of death because of exposure to asbestos during their military service," said Brian Chase, CAOC president. "ALEC is adding insult to lethal injury by meeting in the city that is home to one of California's biggest military bases as well as a vast veteran population, some of them sadly fighting the deadly repercussions of asbestos exposure."

A major protest rally by groups opposed to ALEC is planned Wednesday in San Diego at 3 p.m. at Embarcadero Park North, 400 Kettner Blvd., San Diego. Among those scheduled to appear is California Assembly Speaker Toni Atkins (D-San Diego).

"ALEC's most overt act to date in our state has been this year's effort to undercut the rights of asbestos victims," Chase said. "We need to make sure that California is a 'No ALEC Zone' when it comes to our military veterans and others exposed to asbestos."

Mesothelioma and other lung cancers can develop 30 to 40 years after asbestos enters the body, but once diagnosed the disease can kill in as little as a year or less. Among those hit most heavily by exposure are Navy veterans. For generations, asbestos has been used as a flame-proof insulation for boilers and steam pipes running throughout the guts of naval ships.

Dubbed a modern miracle by manufacturers for its ability to withstand heat and fire, asbestos was used in shipyards, refineries, power plants, schools and in a variety of products. It was heavily marketed into the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century even though manufacturers first learned of its dangers in the 1930s.

At least 15,000 Americans die from asbestos-related causes every year. California, historically a home to major military bases, shipyards and aircraft production facilities, has by far the most victims of any state with about 1,500 deaths a year due to asbestos exposure.

While asbestos is no longer produced in the U.S., its use is still legal, and over the last decade 8 million pounds of the deadly mineral have been imported and made their way into structures across the country, including many in California.

ALEC's asbestos bill was mothballed earlier this year in the face of major opposition by Consumer Attorneys of California and a broad coalition that includes the California Labor Federation, the State Building & Construction Trades Council of California, the Sacramento Central Labor Council, AFL-CIO, the California Professional Firefighters, the State Teamsters and the Environmental Working Group.

But the coalition remains concerned that Cooley will attempt to push the bill anew early next year in an attempt to appease ALEC's wealthy benefactors.

Cooley's bill was modeled on language drafted by ALEC and corporate backers such as the conservative Koch brothers. Georgia-Pacific, a Koch Industries company, has faced massive liability stemming from its use of asbestos in drywall products. Not coincidentally, Georgia-Pacific is on the board of directors of the organization sponsoring AB 597, the Civil Justice Association of California.

*Consumer Attorneys of California is a professional organization of plaintiffs' attorneys representing consumers seeking accountability against wrongdoers in cases involving personal injury, product liability, environmental degradation and other causes.*

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