

Stephen Reynolds, President
Rachael M. Jones, Vice President
Journal of Occupational and Environmental Hygiene (JOEH)

November 21, 2016

Dear Dr. Reynolds and Dr. Jones,

Re: Lotter et al. (2016) Airborne asbestos exposures associated with the installation and removal of roofing products, Journal of Occupational and Environmental Hygiene, 13:8, D121-D131, DOI: 10.1080/15459624.2016.1183010

Thank you for your letter of November 14, 2016, informing me of the change of decision of the JOEH Board.

Both science and ethics require transparency, accountability and respect for the facts. I respectfully point out that, in my opinion, the conduct of the JOEH board demonstrates neither transparency, accountability nor respect for the facts.

In a letter to the JOEH board, Perry Gottesfeld called for the Lotter et al. article to be retracted, pointing out that the article falsely summarizes data that it cites, provides misleading information and contradicts some of the key original research that it references. A letter to the JOEH board from a number of scientists and myself called for the Lotter article to be retracted, pointing out incompetence and gross conflict of interest on the part of the JOEH editor who reviewed and approved the article. We requested the JOEH board to take five specific actions to address the improprieties we had documented. One would expect that a reputable scientific journal would take these matters seriously.

On August 10, 2016, the JOEH Board of Directors voted to retract the Lotter et al. article.

The JOEH Board has now decided, three months later, to recant its decision to retract the article. This reversal after three months is very convenient to the authors, the funder of the article and asbestos interests, with whom the funder, the authors of the article and the JOEH editor who approved the article have substantial financial ties. This decision to reverse the facts and "disappear" the article makes the authors, the JOEH editor and the JOEH Board of Directors unaccountable for the scientific and ethical improprieties committed by trying to make it seem they never occurred and trying to make it seem that the article was never published.

The JOEH has responded with silence and apparent indifference to the inaccuracies contained in the article, documented by Perry Gottesfeld. The JOEH has responded with silence and apparent indifference to the ethical improprieties we documented and our request for specific actions to be taken by the JOEH to prevent further such improprieties. The JOEH has responded with silence and apparent indifference to the harm being caused to populations overseas, exposed to asbestos-cement roofing, by the scientific misinformation and deceptive, industry-serving conclusions of the article.

The JOEH has also responded with silence to our letter of September 25, 2016 in which we stated: "We call on you as President and on the other members of the Board of Directors to act with integrity and implement the decision to retract the article that the Board took at its August 10 meeting. We encourage the JOEH not to abandon scientific and ethical standards and reverse its decision to retract the article in order to bow to pressure from vested interests and/or people with an obvious conflict-of-interest."

The decision of the JOEH Board to reverse its decision of three months ago demonstrates that our concerns were well-founded.

Three months after the August 10 decision by the JOEH board to retract the article, the article is still up on the JOEH website. The article and its flawed scientific information is still being used on the asbestos lobby's website to help sell asbestos-cement roofing in the global South and cause harm to the health of populations overseas.

The JOEH has had plenty of time in the past three months to peer review the article, if it so wished, and verify that the information the article puts forward is grossly flawed, deceptive and harmful and does not meet the standards of a reputable journal. This excuse put forward by the JOEH Board for reversing its decision lacks credibility. Instead, it seems that in the past three months of silence the JOEH board has succumbed to pressure from asbestos interests to conveniently disappear the article and disappear any scientific or ethical accountability.

The facts remain unchanged since the Board voted to retract the article on August 10. Nothing has occurred to justify reversing the decision. I ask that the JOEH Board not bow down to pressure to reverse its decision of August 10, 2016 to retract the article. I ask that the JOEH Board demonstrate transparency, accountability and respect for the facts by providing clear, detailed responses to each of our five requests, submitted to the JOEH Board on July 28, 2016, for specific actions to be taken by the JOEH.

I look forward to receiving a proper and serious response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kathleen Ruff". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "R".

Kathleen Ruff

Senior Human Rights Adviser, Rideau Institute, Canada; Director, Right On Canada; Expert Adviser on human rights and ethics, to the Executive Committee and Chair, International Joint Policy Committee of the Societies of Epidemiology (IJPC-SE); Honorary Fellow, Collegium Ramazzini