

## Asbestos situation in The Gambia: National Asbestos Profile

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Asbestos is a term that has been used to describe a group of six commercially available silicate minerals with fibres that are generally long, thin, and flexible when separated. It was believed that large-scale industrial production of asbestos started in the mid-1900s and intensified after World War II with an estimated production and consumption of 4.8 million metric tonnes per year. This showed a decline to 2.0 million metric tonnes per year in 2002. From the 1930s, the asbestos industry has produced about 300 million metric tonnes of asbestos, globally.

In The Gambia, Asbestos and ACMs were first introduced in the country since the colonial era and importation/ installation continued in the first and second republics for mostly in government facilities specifically to national housing projects and infrastructure as well as water piping systems where asbestos have been extensively used in the country mostly in larger cities and towns across the country. It was reported that the Gambia imports of asbestos and ACMs from 1995 to 2016 summed up to \$303,995 in total monetary value, however, the types, its use and the quantity imported in tonnes was not specified.

This study to assess determine the asbestos and ACMs in The Gambia was carried out through a multitude of inventory team comprising mainly institutions that possesses or uses asbestos and institutions with regulatory mandates were for effective and comprehensive inventory exercise. The inventory exercise was designed to be conducted across the Seven (7) Administrative Regions and the representation of each institution per region was constituted for effective implementation of this inventory exercises. This approach was applied because it was envisaged that officers in the regions are believed to be more conversant of their individual regions.

A total of approximately 320 facilities comprising of public facilities, private facilities, academic facilities, and private homes were inspected and verified to have contained asbestos cement roofs. In addition, secondary use of decommissioned or removed asbestos cement sheets was also discovered during the exercise in many communities mainly as fences in private homes, women's gardens and something even abandoned places.

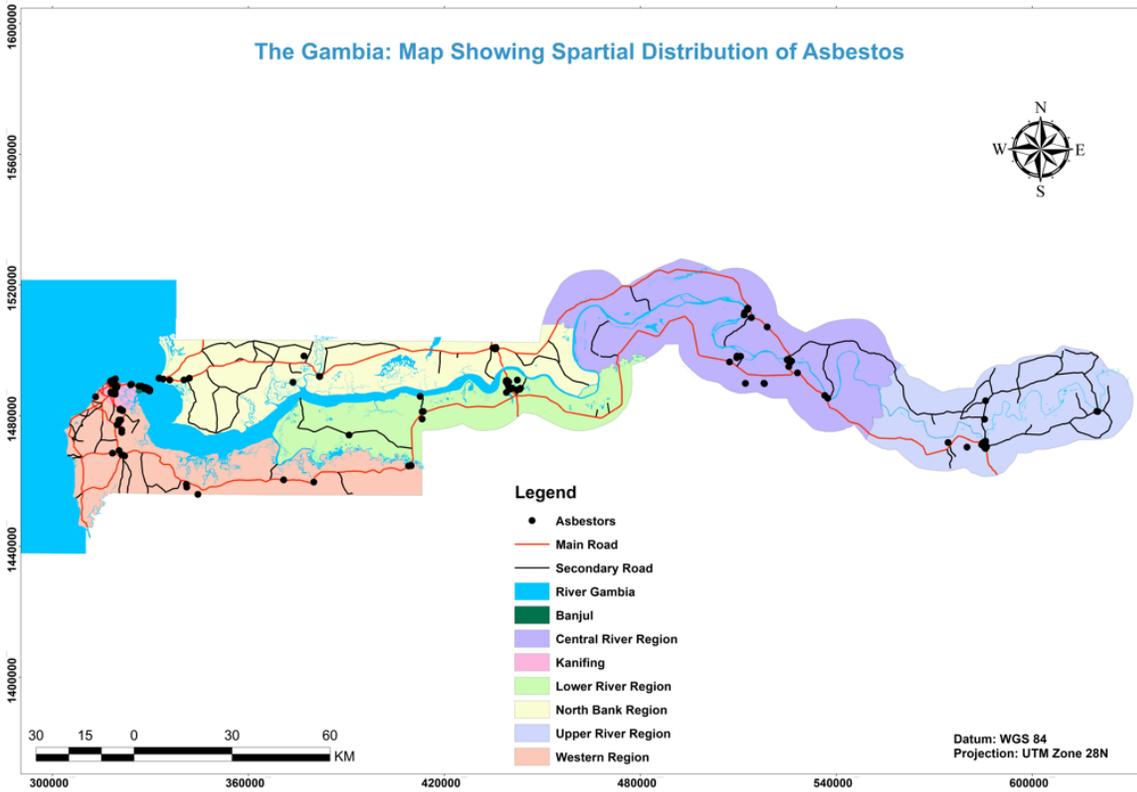
Consequently, the grave extent to which asbestos and ACMs across the country shall require immediate intervention principally from government and as well the private sector. To put this into perspective, a total of 169,120.672 m<sup>2</sup> of asbestos containing cement sheets are laying on building roofs most of which are habited by humans. Furthermore, the secondary uses are of major threat to primary exposures if appropriate measures are not taken once asbestos-containing materials are replaced from existing installations. The chronic health implication associated with asbestos when air borne should be the driving forces to establishing safe management plans at national level, hence there is evidence that installations currently containing such material are in most cases in dilapidated states.

Importantly and interesting, asbestos and ACMs were found in all the 7 administrative regions mainly in public facilities; hospitals, schools, staff accommodations, private housing systems and also underground main water distribution piping networks. Cumulatively, a total of 63,531.5 roofing sheets amounting to a total area of 169,120.672 m<sup>2</sup> was accounted for from public buildings, schools, markets, office buildings, hospitals and private homes throughout the country. The current inventory has shown that a substantive amount of asbestos in the country is mainly asbestos-containing material (precisely asbestos cement).



Findings gathered from the study indicated that asbestos and ACMs presence in the country is quite evident and interestingly a greater proportion of the materials are in installations under the jurisdiction of the public sector such as schools, medical related facilities, agricultural warehouses, government housing facilities, national utility water infrastructure among others.

# The Gambia: Map Showing Spatial Distribution of Asbestos



Total asbestos per region

