

Overalls soaked with sweat and asbestos.

Paolo Russi

I've worked for Enel since 1980, starting off for three months as a shift worker overseeing the turbines and boilers, and calling maintenance if they broke down. After that I was transferred to the Maintenance workshops where I had to adjust settings on machinery such as hydraulic motors and turbine valves.

From that very beginning, I was always surrounded by asbestos.

In 2000 they transferred me to the "coal" department. There the maintenance consisted of chipping off the asbestos coatings with small hammers. To get the stuff off maintenance valves, we used compressed air that threw up thick asbestos dust and hung around the whole workshop for a month. The same happened when we used our angle grinders and drills.

I remember that when we had to get into the corners of 74 metre high boilers where the burners were, we were in direct contact with asbestos. Our overalls became soaked in our sweat (temperatures were over 40 degrees C) and impregnated with fibres. We then took our overalls home to be washed and in turn contaminated our homes with the stuff.

Our contact with asbestos was even more direct when maintaining fans. Asbestos just flaked off, as a result of the expansion and contraction in their casings when subject to changes in temperature,

Unbeknown to us we were working in a dangerous environment with inadequate masks. That was until 1988, when the "danger" signs went up and the appropriate masks were issued.

Three years after the 1992 law recognizing absentees exposure was passed, I took legal action. At the initial hearing, it was established that there was a case to answer, but a day later it was made pending on technical grounds. The final judgement, several years later, ruled against me because I failed to reach the stipulated 100 fibres per litre in my body.

Today, like my colleagues, I await the decision of the Supreme Court.