

SILVANA MOSSANO

October 8th 2021 Hearing

Taking the Cathedral as the point reference for the town of Casale Monferrato, there are 1276 metres to Eternit plant in Via Oggero, in the Ronzone district. A few easy comparisons (which can easily be found on the Internet, but which many of us have probably experienced personally): it is like walking halfway along the Naples seafront (just over 2500 metres) or taking a round trip of the Arcades in via Po in Turin (700 metres each way). This means that the plant where asbestos was processed as a raw material was close to the houses. Among the houses, shops, schools. At the the Eternit Bis hearing on Monday 8 October 2021, the Prosecution's expert witnesses Francesco Grassi and Laura Turconi, were heard and used maps, plans and photographs. ¹

HOW ASBESTOS SPREAD THROUGHOUT THE CITY

The graphs shows a sort of spider web of coloured lines, mostly red and yellow, drawing the daily routes, multiplied over decades, of the 'little train' and of uncovered lorries, say the witnesses, that carried sacks of raw material from the railway station to the plant and the finished products (sheets and pipes) from the factory to the warehouses in Piazza d'Armi and then to the station. The routes the lorries took transporting scrap and processing waste from Via Oggero to the Bagna dump on the left bank of the Po were also shown.

When people said that Casale Monferrato was Eternit's factory town, i.e. the city identified with its most important factory, the definition also applies to the what air people breathed in the town: asbestos was present throughout, carried here and there. At the end of 1976 Eternit employed 1126 workers, on different shifts: from one to three per day/night. Eternit facilities were scattered: more concentrated in the Ronzone district, but also in other places, used for industrial activity, witnesses said. Some witnesses have already repeated it at the Assize Court trial in Novara. However, the defence lawyers, Alfonso Di Amato and Guido Carlo Alleva, objected that there were also cement factories around Eternit: perhaps they believe those "clouds" that rose twirling in the air or those layers in which bicycle tyres were planted or that impregnated blue overalls came from other factories in the area?

In order to clear up the doubts, prosecutors Gianfranco Colace and Mariagiovanna Compare asked their experts to look at the opposite side of the plant, the one facing the river Po, where the material from the process was discharged.

THE BUILD UP IN THE RIVER

Experts examined documents and technical evidence, some of it from the company, and found an *"asbestos accumulation 135 metres long by over 40 along the river, covering an area of just under 6,500 square metres, with an average thickness of 2 metres (but in some places even 4), equal to a volume of 12,000 cubic metres of asbestos-containing deposit"*. There was both chrysotile (white)

¹ The Swiss businessman Stephan Schmidheiny, who was the owner and manager of Eternit Italia between 1976 and 1986, stands accused of the murder (with wilfulness) of 392 people from Casale who died of asbestos related diseases.

and crocidolite (blue), as shown by the tests attached to the 2006 Town's Reclamation Plan. *"The liquid effluents from processing and cleaning the machines reached the waters of the Po through a channel (...) forming incrustations: real layers that were rock-like along the embankment and in the river". "On the right bank of the Po, Eternit relentlessly discharged materials with a high asbestos content through a channel coming directly from the plant".* In 1980, the company designed a purification plant, which, according to maps, was opened in 1981. But this, as geologist Turconi reiterated in her conclusions, *'it does not appear to have significantly reduced the volumes of material with a high asbestos content dispersed into the River Po'*. And *'waste containing asbestos was also dumped on the left bank'*: it was the waste that was channelled to the Bagna. Let's give a few figures for reference, the geologist summarised: *"Twenty tonnes of 'dry' discharge per week, are 940 tonnes per year, about 650 cubic metres per year, that is 32 thousand cubic metres of waste containing asbestos"* discharged into the river. *"And these are conservative numbers,"* Turconi pointed out, because over the years the accumulation has partly been washed away (and then gradually reformed) carried by annual floods, including the most recent major floods of 1994 and 2000. However, despite erosion, the behemoth build up is there to see. *"No one but the local authorities have cleaned up both banks of the river Po, and that took place as from the 1990s"* concluded the geologist "

THE MAP OF THE VICTIMS

Where did the 392 asbestos live? They are the asbestos victims of Casale whose death is debated in the Eternit bis trial - people who could have lived, and certainly could have lived longer. The Prosecution instructed Dario Patricelli and Fabio Belci to map where they lived (a tough job that meant they had to knock on the doors of the offices of 24 districts, mainly Casale and its surroundings), because many had lived in different neighbourhoods, hamlets or villages during their lives. For each of the 392 lost lives, the experts prepared a card and placed a pin everywhere the people had lived: a total of 933 places, for the 62 former workers and 330 members of the community who never worked at the plant. An example of a card? Paola Chiabrera: *" For six years she lived in the Casale hamlet of San Germano, twenty-one years in Ozzano and ten in Casale"*. What is most striking, in this case, is the year of her birth: 1976, the year in which Stephan Schmidheiny took direct control of Eternit in Italy. It cannot be said that Paola Chiabrera, who died of mesothelioma at the age of 37, breathed in asbestos under previous managements. Then there are people lived outside the Casale district. In these cases, research was even more thorough: they also consulted questionnaires filled in by the patients themselves and gathered by *Renam* (the Mesothelioma Registry). For example, Paola Biasi had always lived in Genoa, but in her first sixteen years she spent her holidays in Monferrato, in Frassinello, one of the villages in the Casale area. Another case: Massimo Bonino, between 1976 and 1986 (period of interest for the trial that is being held in the Assize Court), was resident in Vercelli. And so? In that same period of time, however, he was 'working as a travelling salesman for a company in Casale'.

NEXT HEARINGS

On Friday, 22 October, consultants Stefano Silvestri and Alessia Angelini will be heard. On Monday 25 October, the series of expert witnesses will be momentarily interrupted and some witnesses will be heard: family members of the victims.