

March the 21st 2022 Eternit Hearing

By

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It has already been said time and time again: the history of Casale is that of a factory town. Casale & Eternit like Alessandria & Borsalino Hats, like Turin & Fiat cars, like Ivrea & Olivetti.

In Casale, the Eternit plant made asbestos containing artifacts for eighty years, but, unlike the other above mentioned factory cities, here, even after the closure of the plant in 1986, the bond has not yet been severed. We would like to sever the link, and how, but asbestos fibers have an evil feature: they cause a cancer called mesothelioma which develops after a very long latency, 20, 30, or even 40 years. People still develop the disease here, we still die this is why we are still bound to history in our stories. In the History of Casale, the stories of the people of Casale are alike, with the same images, the same memories, stories echo each other.

Defense lawyers Lawyers Astolfo Di Amato and Guido Carlo Alleva, for the Swiss businessman Stephan Schmidheiny, previously accused of willful disaster in the Eternit maxi-trial (sentence cancelled due to the statute of limitations in 2014) and now accused of voluntary murder in the Eternit Bis trial, have called about ninety family members of mesothelioma victims to testify at Court of Assize in Novara trial: in the indictment against the Swiss entrepreneur, there are 392 names in the list of asbestos victims, a sample of the many more. More than twenty witnesses were heard on March the 16th, about 15 on Monday the 21st and the remaining ones will testify on Monday, March the 28th. Some have sent medical certificates as they were unable to attend for health reasons, and in other cases the defense lawyers (represented in the courtroom by their associates Alessio Di Amato and by Maria Cristina Amoruso) said they were no longer required.

After all, more or less all of them offer similar testimonies, and the information is already in the files the Public Prosecutor has submitted for each case available in the court file. Perhaps the defense, thought that the accounts from the actual voice of the victims' families might have impressed the Court (President Gianfranco Pezzone, the judge Manuela Massino and the six members of the Jury aka *popular judges*).

Above all, those details are aimed at sowing doubts about the actual responsibilities of the accused, highlighting what does not concern him timewise. What exposures is the defendant not accountable for? For example, is he responsible for deaths caused by asbestos in roofs on houses, garages, schools and warehouses, and sheds: the roofs, in fact, were installed legally, when their use was not yet banned. What period cannot be attributed to Schmidheiny in terms of contamination? Those prior to 1976: in fact, the Swiss businessman was the actual manager of the company from that year, and until the closure of the plant in 1986. If precautions were not taken (e.g. the installation of aspiration systems or the use of protective equipment), or any indiscriminate and criminal uses of asbestos (e.g., crushing in open air, or the handing out of [compacted] asbestos dust and other waste to citizens) pre-dating his management, it would fall to those who were there before Schmidheiny and who today are no longer here for a number of reasons. If, on the contrary, that kind of conduct took place between 1976 and 1986, then the Swiss entrepreneur is accountable.

Sometimes, calling the victims' families to witness does not help the defense. It already happened on March the 16th , and it did again in some cases on Monday the 21st .

For example, **Nicoletta Minazzi** was called to testify about the death of her father **Ferdinando** due to mesothelioma. "My dad had always lived on a farm on the Sant'Anna hill, he was a farmer. If he had a little time off ...but he had very little free time ... he would go hunting." And was there a chicken coop? Oh yes, what farmhouse does not have a henhouse? "There was one, with a roof made of Eternit ". Was it big? "No, just a small chicken coop, I know because I used to pay local rates to the local authority on it". The defense wanted to stop there but PP Dr Gianfranco Colace instead wants to ask another question: 'Did you ever hear about the area, outside the factory, where the scrap metal was kept and where the asbestos scrap was crushed?' " "I heard about it, but I'd never seen that operation carried out. But he had heard about it". The PP continues. "So..." the witness draws her breath in, and then: "I worked at Eternit from 1981 to 1985, first in the Genoa offices (where the legal office was located), then in Casale". This is Stephan Schdmiheiny's management period. "And what did you see?" "When we went to the canteen, we cut through the open areas of the factory to avoid the long way round. When passing close to the Hazemag mill, I would see workers, shoveling up that material without any protection, well, they said it came from the crushing process...and they and they were throwing it into the mill." Anything else? "Yes, when I got off work my blue car looked like it was speckled with white dust freckles."

Ornella Patrucco lost her mother, **Anna Maria Bonzano**, to mesothelioma. "In Via Leopardi, where she lived with my dad, yes, there was an asbestos cement roof." And which of your mother's family members worked at Eternit? "I believe my grandfather Ernesto may have worked as a courier for Eternit, his brother Sergio my uncle was a worker at Eternit as was my father." For how long? "When my parents got married in 1955, he was already working there." From the mid-1950s; but how long for did Anna Maria Bonzano's husband, father of Ornella Patrucco, bring home his overalls to wash? "Until the 1980s for sure: when I got married in 1978, he was still working at Eternit".

Rosanna Rosada, **Angela Cabiale's** daughter: "My mother moved and changed house quite often. I can't remember if there were Eternit roofs nearby. But I can say that, in the short time when she lived in Liguria (near the sea), she breathed better, the air was cleaner. Casale, on the other hand, in those years she was a sewer". One of the houses she lived in was also the one on the Cavalcavia (the Overpass) , "where she managed a grocery store." Not near the plant, "no, but the trucks went by on their way to the "Piccola" (the freight yard of the train station) where the freight trains arrived and departed" . the witness gets up from the stand, says goodbye, then reconsiders and adds: "I want to point out that my mother died of suffocation, it's the worst death there isshe couldn't get oxygen to her lungs, not when I set the ventilator to max".

Rosella Adragna is the widow of **Giancarlo Ferraris**: "My husband worked as a mechanic, a fitter at the Officine Meccaniche Cerutti. Was there asbestos there? "I don't think so." Not even in his parents' home? "I don't remember." Had she been asked at the time to answer a questionnaire for the Mesothelioma Registry? "I don't recall. When my husband fell ill, he survived ten months, but he used to do the paperwork. I have a severely disabled son; I have to take care of him and then I took care of my husband when he became too ill". Was your father-in-law a worker at Eternit? "Yes, he was, I know he had asbestosis and that was the cause of his death in 1989". And until when did he work at Eternit? "Until 1985".

Maria Grazia Accatino is **Mauro Cavallone's** widow; **Luciana Lucchese** is **Paolo Cavallone's** widow. They are sisters-in-law: they married brothers Mauro and Paolo, who both died of mesothelioma within a few years

of each other. It's an emblematic story: neither Mauro nor Paolo ever worked at Eternit, but they lived near it, in the Ronzone district, in via Rotondino. How close to the plant? A few hundred meters? Maria Grazia Accatino thinks for a moment, looks around and then, sure: "As from here where I am sitting at the end of the hall" (it is the length of the courtroom in Novara). They lived there "all their lives... as kids, with friends, and you know boys, they played football with their friends, in the street " explains Luciana Lucchese. The parents of the Cavallone brothers worked at Eternit: the father worked for 40 years, the mother until she had her two children. And of were there any asbestos artifacts around the house? "They were everywhere: in the courtyards, around the flower beds... I, rather than seeing, heard about it from my in-laws."

Andrea Rosso, son of **Bianca Raiteri**: "My grandfather worked at Eternit. He retired before I was born, I think in the early nineteen fifties. " And who washed your grandfather's overalls? "My mother did until she got married and lived with her parents, she washed them ".

Brunella Pia, **Letizia Gasperini's** daughter: "My maternal grandfather worked at Eternit and my mother used to wash the dusty overalls until she married my father: he brought them home and she washed them.

Vincenzo Lumello, widower of **Graziella Castelletti**: "My wife never worked at Eternit". Were there any asbestos products in the house where you lived in Via Aliora? "No, nothing." What about the garage? "We had no garage."

Pierluisa Mongiani, daughter of **Iolanda Castelli**. Where did your mother live? "In Via Oggero, close to the Eternit factory, until the early Nineteen Sixties. Then in Via Matteotti". Were there asbestos artifacts In Via Oggero? "Yes, courtyard, roofs, vegetable gardens... everything." And in Via Matteotti? "No, no, none there."

Tiffany Fumia, widow of **Giorgio Costanzo**: "My husband lived in the hamlet Casale Popolo and then, in the town in Via Morano. When we got married, in the 2000s, we got a house in the Valentino area." "Were there asbestos artifacts?" "I think there were in Popolo yes, I think, my husband told me that they had asbestos in the yard, in the garden boundaries, on a tool shed." "And, at Valentino, was your house adjoining the headquarters of a car dealership that had an asbestos roof?" "Yes, but that roof had been removed and remediated by the time moved there".

Daniele Pia is the son of **Francesca Bertana**: "My mother was a teacher, she taught in some villages close by and in the city, in Oltreponte, at the XXV April school." Where did she live? "First in Viale Marchino and then in Via Boccaccio. Yes, in this house the roof was made of asbestos, they had laid it down in 1974". Bertana worked as a teacher until the 1996/97 school year. "In 1998 she displayed the first symptoms of mesothelioma, and in 1999 she passed away."

Mario Crosio is the son of **Giovanni Crosio**: "He lived in Via Gonzaga and then in Via Cobiauchi" in the same 100 square meters all his life. Were there asbestos artifacts in the area? "Yes, a garage roof, the kitchen overlooked and, then, also the garages around: it was surrounded. There was also the Leardi Junior High School, entirely clad in asbestos".

Vincenzo and Maria Costa, children of **Calogera Di Pierri**. All born in Sicily and then emigrated to Casale. Was there asbestos in the houses where you lived? "Yes, on the roofs... My mother died of that disease there, we didn't even know what it was".

Giovanna Celoria, widow of **Primo Dusio**: "My husband had his own business for 40-45 years, but before 1973 he had been a plumber. He may have done the same job at Eternit". "Where did he live?" "As a

bachelor in Oltreponte and, when we got married, in via Bassano Del Grappa." And were there asbestos artifacts there? "A roof, yes, it was removed in 1990."

Next hearings

On March the 28th, the last of the defense family member witnesses.

This will be followed by the hearings with the expert witnesses (starting with the technical accountants, continuing with the hygienists, and then the other experts).

The dates are April 4 and 11; May 16, 23 and 30; June 22; July 11 and 18.

Short of unforeseen circumstances, the hearings will be followed by the closing statements. The verdict will presumably be between October and November.

In the meantime, on March 23rd the closing statements of Eternit cases being heard at the Naples Court of Assizes in Naples, for eight mesothelioma victims from the Bagnoli Eternit plant. The defendant Schmidheiny is charged with willful murder.

<https://www.silmos.it/eternit-bis-lauto-blu-tutta-puntinata-di-lentiggini-di-polvere/>

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