



Why the Canadian Town of Asbestos wants a new Name

A) Warm up

1. What factors do you think can attract tourists and business to a town?
2. What would make you not want to visit a town?

B) Adapted Text - Why the Canadian Town of Asbestos Wants a New Name

Why The Canadian Town of Asbestos Wants a New Name

Adapted from an article published in 2020 by BBC Worklife

Many towns have unfortunate names. Some make money off them, others change them. What's the best option?

Finding ways to attract new business opportunities and investors is never an easy task for any town, especially in today's hypercompetitive, global market. But that mission gets even tougher when you happen to be named after a carcinogenic mineral banned in nearly 60 countries.

Such is **the plight of** Asbestos, a small French-Canadian community in south-eastern Québec, Canada.

"One of our economic development employees was in the US last year for a congress, looking for international opportunities," recalls Caroline Payer, a town councillor for Asbestos. "People were even refusing his business card because Asbestos was written on it, and they thought that maybe even the card was dangerous. When you start off like that, it's not great."

Such incidents have now driven Asbestos to drastic measures. Between 14-18 October, its 6,800 residents will vote to rename it either L'Azur-des-Cantons, Jeffrey-sur-le-Lac, Larochelle, Phénix, Trois-Lacs and Val-des-Sources, a shortlist that was extended from four to six names earlier this month after residents complained they did not have enough choice. It is an expensive process that will cost in the region of USD\$100,000 (CAD\$133,000) to complete, but the town's leaders are convinced that they will **reap the rewards down the line**. "Our name is **putting people off** doing business with us," says Payer. "It's very sad."

It was not always so. A once **sought-after** mineral, asbestos was mined in the town for more than a century, for use in construction and manufacturing industries. The gigantic 2km-wide Jeffrey Mine created thousands of well-paid jobs in the community, shaping its development and identity.

But from the 1920s onward, evidence has increasingly emerged linking asbestos to diseases such as lung cancer. The World Health Organization has estimated in the past that annually, more than 100,000 people worldwide die from illnesses related to asbestos exposure. In 2011, the Jeffrey Mine was closed for good.

Since then the town has tried repeatedly **to revamp** its image, and generate new means of supporting the local economy. There was an attempt to turn the Jeffrey Mine into an adventure-tourism hub, complete with rock climbing and mountain-biking trails, although this did not **get off the ground** due to public health concerns. According to Payer, they employed branding and public relations consultants to redesign the town's logo and website, and sent representatives on numerous business prospecting trips to persuade companies to invest in the town.



It has all been **in vain**. "Last year there was a company who was thinking of our town to implement its business, which would have created 30 new jobs," says Payer. "But one of their main criteria was to choose a place with a name that would not cause trouble at shipping or exporting, and so we lost that opportunity. It's one of many similar examples in the last few years."

In a broader sense, Asbestos' struggles highlight the economic implications of a place name, especially if it develops negative connotations over the course of time, or happens to be perceived as unusual. How towns adapt to this varies, depending on the community, and the name itself. Some have **gone to great lengths to** change, while others have embraced the attention and found ways to exploit their name as a **lucrative** source of revenue.

The value of a name

Such a name can hold enormous commercial value. Perhaps the most long-standing example of this is the Norwegian village of Hell – its name **stems from** the Old Norse word 'hellir', meaning cliff cave – which has been a popular tourist destination for almost a century. In the 1930s, the New York Times reported Americans visiting the village to pose for photographs next to the railway station sign, and purchase 'Hell is frozen over' postcards. The publicity has enabled Hell to stage numerous events including the annual Hell Blues Festival, and even the RallyCross World Championships.

"The name has made Hell into a travel brand," says Kjersti Greger, Trøndelag's marketing and communications manager. "The people who live there have even put up a Hollywood-style Hell sign on the hillside to make it more visible."

In recent years, others have sought innovative ways to capitalise on their names, through the power of social media. The towns of Boring, US; Dull, Scotland; and **Bland**, Australia – all named after the surnames of original settlers – have united to form the League of Extraordinary Communities on Facebook, a partnership that has been featured in advertising campaigns for Coca-Cola, Unilever and Jaguar.

Misaligning interests

Asbestos may not wish to stand out but in the eyes of branding experts, **shaking off** the

legacy of its **tarnished** history will not be easy, even with a name like Phénix or Trois-Lacs. “It would be relatively straightforward for a prospective investor looking to move there to discover that this was the town formerly known as Asbestos,” says Andrea Insch, a researcher at New Zealand’s Otago University, who specialises in place marketing. “You can’t bury that history that easily, then next day wake up, and it’s a new town.”

In the upcoming vote, Asbestos residents are not being given the option of sticking with the existing name, even though some still **object to** the name change. But Insch says that managing such emotions sensitively will be important if the town is to successfully reinvent itself. “You have to consider the perspective of the locals to the place, why they are defensive of that name and want to keep it,” she says. “We don’t expect that there will be a big miracle and suddenly everyone’s going to come here. We feel the positive impact will be seen in five, maybe 10 years, which is why we’re involving the next generation. Those young people are going to live in this town for much longer than we are. For their sakes, when you lose one job because of your town’s name, it’s one too many. We believe that by changing the name, we are turning toward the future, and creating the toolbox to go forward and have a good economic development.”

Link to the original article:

<https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20201008-why-the-canadian-town-of-asbestos-wants-a-new-name>

C) Key Words from Context

Based on the context of the article, can you match the words in the box to the definitions listed below? Then add the word into the example sentence. You may need to change the form of the word to fit the meaning of the sentence.

plight	to reap the rewards	down the line	to put someone off
sought-after	to revamp	in vain	to object to
to tarnish	lucrative	to stem from	bland
to go to great lengths		to get something off the ground	

1. To get the good things which come from something: _____

“We are _____ of all the preparation that we put in at the beginning of the project.”

2. To start something such as an activity or a project: _____

"Due to a lack of funding, it looks like we are going to struggle to _____ this project _____."

3. To say something to express your strong disagreement with something:

"Many Members of Parliament _____ the proposals."

4. Highly profitable, producing a lot of profit: _____

"This market is extremely _____."

5. To give a completely new, improved form and structure to something: _____

"We have decided to _____ the sales department completely."

"We're going to _____ the strategy, because it is not working at all."

6. To be caused by something: _____

"The problems that we are experiencing _____ our lack of preparation."

7. To try very hard to achieve something: _____

"We always _____ to provide the best service to our clients."

8. An extremely difficult or unfortunate situation: _____

"The government has done nothing to help the _____ of homeless people in the country."

"The desperate financial _____ of the popular small cafe during the Covid 19 lockdown caused it to shut down."

9. To cause someone to lose interest or enthusiasm in something, or to cause someone not to want something: _____

"There is a restaurant right next to my apartment, but the bad reviews _____ me _____ going there."

"We have a very dated website, which I think is _____ people _____ buying our services."

10. Without success or a result: _____

"We lost the game, so all of our hard work was _____."

11. At a later, unspecified point in a project, activity or in someone's life:

"If we don't prepare properly, then we may experience problems _____."

12. To make someone have a worse opinion of you than they had before: _____

"The scandal has certainly _____ the company's image."

13. Desired, in great demand: _____

"AI professionals are extremely _____ in today's market."

"Some of these rare items are really _____ among collectors."

14. Lacking any strong features or characteristics, plain and boring: _____

"The plain white walls in the office are extremely _____."

"Unfortunately, the food in the restaurant was fairly _____."

D) Comprehension

Can you answer the questions below about the text?

1. Why is the name 'Asbestos' so troublesome?

2. Why was it difficult for an Asbestos economic development employee to network effectively at a congress last year?

3. Why was the town named Asbestos in the first place?

4. How did the town try to reinvent its image, and was it successful?

5. How has the Norwegian village of Hell managed to take advantage of its interesting name?

6. According to the final paragraph, which factor is key to ensuring a successful rebrand of Asbestos?

E) Key Words in a New Context

Below you can find a paragraph. Can you fill in the gaps in the paragraph with the words from the box below? You may need to change the form of some of the verbs in order for them to fit into the sentence. Some of the idioms may be split between two gaps:

to reap the rewards	in vain	down the line	to put someone off
lucrative	to go to great lengths	bland	to get something off the ground

The Plight of the Start-up

New statistics released earlier this year show that nearly 50% of start-ups fail within the first 5 years, and 60% fail within the first 10 years. Something which is often seen as an extremely _____ endeavour, full of financial and wholesome rewards, can easily go wrong very quickly, even with very talented, passionate and driven entrepreneurs at the helm.

Many ambitious new entrepreneurs come up with a wonderful idea, but don't realise just how much hard work it takes even just to begin. Start-up owners need to

_____ just to _____ the start-up _____ in the first place, and it can take years before you finally manage to break even.

It is true that the statistics don't make pretty reading.

The idea that all of this hard work could be _____ is very likely to _____ some potential entrepreneurs _____ the idea of starting a business, but it is also important to consider the rewards that a start-up offers, and Elon Musk will tell you that the rewards are absolutely huge.

However, after a hellish first few years of consistent work, a competent start-up owner can _____. Some of the most successful start-ups have made their owners billionaires, and there is the additional satisfaction of having avoided a potentially _____ career as an employee working on projects that they don't particularly care about passionately enough.

