

FILE NAME: Shree Digvijay (SDV)

DATE: 1983 Apr 16

DOC#: SDV027

DOCUMENT DESCRIPTION: Letter from Thakorebhai Desai Smarak Bhavan to Barry Castleman RE Shree Digvijay Cement Co.



CONSUMER EDUCATION AND RESEARCH CENTRE

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Cem/Dig/'83

April 16, 1983

Gram : CONSUMER

Ph. No. 448833

Dear Mr. Castleman,

Sub: Shri Digvijay Cement Company, Ahmedabad.

I have just now received your letter of April 4, 1983. I am sorry not to have acknowledged the receipt of the material which you were good enough to send me. They were invaluable and the photographs are beautiful. Thank you.

Let me tell you all that has happened since we took up this matter with Shri Digvijay.

As soon as we had gone through the New Scientist write-up, we wrote to them pointing out all the lapses and violations of the 'Factory Laws' provisions viz-a-viz safety measures, health records, etc. Initially they wrote back a very flattering letter about our activities and exonerated themselves of all responsibility putting it on other Government Authorities like the Railways, Pollution Board etc. But we wrote back pointing out that these were lapses for which they were responsible under the Factory Laws.

In the meanwhile I had, on my own, also visited the factory unofficially and scouted the adjoining area. As a result of our insistence and demands, the Factory Manager, Mr. Thakkar and the President Mr. S.R. Bhandari personally visited us at the Centre. We discussed all the matters at great length for a couple of hours. The upshot of this discussion was that we visited the factory premises and saw things for ourselves.

It would be fair to say that some improvements have been made though much yet remains to be done. First, let me talk about the improvements made.

As soon as we entered the factory, we noticed the large Bill Boards all around cautioning against Asbestos dust and the hazards of asbestos. Some how, the Bill Boards appeared to be too new and shiny. A discrete enquiry with one of the vacuum cleaners revealed that the warnings had been put up only that morning.

The fibre opening section is still a dry one, though they expect to change over to the wet system by the end of the year. Orders for the necessary equipment have already been placed. Consequently asbestos fibres still continue to float around.

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The pipe cutting-section however continues to remain a dry one and a lot of dust is thrown out.

Though the workers had been provided with the masks and a head cloth, it was obvious that they were not comfortable with them. I did ask some of them whether they liked ~~the~~ the masks. Their answer was in the negative. Then I tried on one of the masks which the workers were using. It was really uncomfortable because it hardly allowed one to breath comfortably. In fact it consisted of two layers of cloth, one was plain and the other was a kind of gauze layer. The masks looked too clean for my liking. So I asked them when they had been given these masks. Interestingly, they replied, "Today".

One vacuum cleaner to pick up asbestos dust, was seen operating. Change and wash rooms, though constructed, were yet to be allotted to the workers. Workers in the Fibre-feeding and Pipe-finishing section had also been provided with gloves and overalls.

However, no details regarding the health records of the workers have been maintained. This includes a general check-up and radiological examination. The law stipulates a Chest Scan (Radiological Examination) within the first 6 months of recruitment followed by an examination every 3 years. Digvijay has stated that they have been carrying out a medical inspection and that any worker found to be suffering from lung disorders have been transferred to other sections. Further according to them, it is the responsibility of the Certifying Surgeon of the Factory Inspectorate to carry out the surveillance maintain records. According to us, it is their responsibility, as per Factory rules

Wastes continue to be dumped in and around the factory premises. So also, people living in the vicinity continue to be exposed to asbestos waste effluents as well as ~~pieces~~ pieces of asbestos. A great deal of asbestos dust continues to fly around in the factory. Contract Labour also appears to be unprotected.

We are now going to have a final round of talks with the factory management. The purpose is to make them commit themselves to time-bound phased programme to be implemented within a reasonable period of time, at the end of which all the issues would have been taken care of. We shall do our best to see that this programme has some sanction behind it so that it is enforceable at the judicial forum if need be.

In the meanwhile, we have also been able to enlist the support of the Trade Union people who are supposed to be looking after the interests of their worker members at Digvijay.

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I hope that I have given you a satisfactorily detailed account of the matter.

I am glad that you are addressing the John Hopkins School. Could I have an advance copy of the lecture which you propose to give them? It will, I am sure, make very interesting reading. I wish you good luck for the forth-coming lecture.

With best wishes,

Yours sincerely,



Miss Rani Advani
Legal Research Coordinator.

P.S: Could we use relevant extracts from your lecture for reproducing in our journal etc?

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