

Asbestos Information Association/North America

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July 24, 1973

Mr. John H. Stender
Assistant Secretary of Labor
Occupational Safety and Health Administration
Room 1115
U.S. Department of Labor
14th Street and Constitution Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20210

Dear Mr. Stender:

In recent months it has become common knowledge throughout the asbestos manufacturing industry in the United States, which the Asbestos Information Association/North America represents, that the Occupational Safety and Health Administration is planning to undertake a complete review of the occupational health standards on asbestos promulgated by OSHA in June of 1972.

When the current standards were first published, certain doctors and representatives of organized labor unjustifiably attacked the standards voraciously in the press as being totally insufficient to protect the health of workers in the asbestos industry. The main target of these assaults, which have continued down to the present day, was the so-called "two fiber standard" scheduled to go into effect in July of 1976. It was claimed either that this standard should go into effect immediately, or in two years, but certainly not in four. More recently it has been claimed that even two fibers is too high a level to protect industry workmen.

With the upcoming review of the OSHA asbestos regulations, these efforts to discredit the two fiber standard have intensified for obvious reasons. The most serious assault to date was delivered by Dr. Irving J. Selikoff of the Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York, at the American Industrial Hygiene Association Conference in Boston on May 21.

In his presentation, a transcript of which is attached, Dr. Selikoff claimed that new research in Great Britain proved that the British Occupational Hygiene Society (BOHS) recommended asbestos standard of two fibers per cc, upon which the United States standard is largely based, was no longer adequate as a safe exposure level.



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Because of the seriousness of this allegation, Dr. Selikoff's comments were brought to the attention of those doctors in Great Britain whose research was being interpreted by Dr. Selikoff in this manner. On July 12, a letter from Dr. H. C. Lewinsohn and Dr. S. Holmes was sent to Dr. Selikoff pointing out serious errors in his interpretation of their research data.

We refer you specifically to the second paragraph of the letter, a copy of which is attached, in which it is stated that:

"We are also very displeased at the manner in which you have used the information we provided in order to launch what appears to us to be a political campaign in the U.S.A. aimed at discrediting our Hygiene Standard for asbestos. We cannot accept the implication that the HCL (H.C. Lewinsohn) publication allows doubt to be cast on the validity of the BOHS Standard and are of the opinion that such a conclusion is unwarranted."

We bring this matter to your attention for the very important reason that the Department of Labor, specifically the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, is charged with the duty under the law of protecting American workmen from occupational disease, and that in order to discharge this duty properly and without bias, all facts relevant to a particular situation must be examined. Since a number of OSHA personnel attended the AIHA meeting at which Dr. Selikoff made his now discredited allegations, we felt that it was imperative that OSHA be immediately informed of the true state of affairs with regard to this situation so that Dr. Selikoff's comments could be evaluated in their proper light.

We request, therefore, that the letter of Drs. Lewinsohn and Holmes be distributed within OSHA to all those individuals who attended the AIHA conference or whose duties involve dealing with the occupational health aspects of asbestos, especially to Mr. Gerard Scannell and Mr. John O'Neill, with whom we have worked in the past on this problem. We are taking the liberty of enclosing two additional copies of the Selikoff-Lewinsohn papers for these two gentlemen.

Very truly yours,

Matthew M. Swetonic

Matthew M. Swetonic
Executive Secretary

Enclosures