FILE NAME: General Motors (GM)

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DOCUMENT DESCRIPTION: Memo RE Status of GM Program for Replacing Asbestos in Brakes

Re: Status of General Motors Program for Replacing Asbestos in Brakes

Ultimately, someone will have to identify the technical experts in the company and ask them about the real status of the program. We should at least make a point of finding out who these experts are. Let's start with this:

General Motors Programs on Non-Asbestos Friction Materials for Brake Systems. 1 page, no author listed. September 7, 1979, passed on to me (now lost) by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. This announced that 60% of all passenger car disc brakes (GM) had non-asbestos friction materials. It projected that all GM 1983 model cars with disc brakes would have asbestos-free brakes, and all cars and light trucks with drum brakes would have asbestos-free brakes by the 1985 model year.

1. I suspect that with the deregulation going on in Washington, they have slowed the pace of their asbestos elimination program. Asbestos use in brakes actually went up a little from 1980-1981, after dropping off from 1978 on. Who wrote this report, and what other reports are there inside the company in the same files that will show us what's going on? The jury and the public would like to know if GM is willing to exceed its customary standard of safety and try to prevent Nicholson's prediction of 20,000 excess deaths over the next 40 years from brake repair(an impossible problem to regulate shop-by-shop) from coming true and continuing beyond 2020. That's what we are trying to prevent.

2. Technical questions, aside from the personnel ones to get at who the company experts are in asbestos substitution technology:

   whattis their timetable today for the things mentioned in the 1979 release? Are they making their milestone dates to meet these deadlines, or exceed them? What are today's models like?

   what patents do they have regarding asbestos substitutes in brakes or anything else? what articles have their techinal people published along these lines in the last 10 yrs (including anything "in press")?

   what correspondence do they have with government agencies or persons outside the company regarding these programs? what memos exist on the progress of the program?

I'd like to get this kind of information, at least what they'd give up easily first, and have Stephen Berger do a technical review with me to get to the next step. Steve's in Oakland, now, attending graduate school at Berkeley in environmental engineering (6631 Saroni Dr. 94611). He has written the asbestos substitutes chapter of my book, on insulation. Book won't be out until July.

NIOSH estimates 900,000 people in this country regularly do brake repairs. Most of them use a compressed air hose to blow off accumulated dust, a mortal risk. Langer recently published a case report of asbestosis-mesothelioma in a brake repair worker (Lancet Nov. 13, 1982, p. 1103), and there will be many more.

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