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DOCUMENT DESCRIPTION: Memo to M.G. King RE A.B.A. Wittenoom, Industrial Disease (Asbestosis & Silicosis) and Current Liability Rate at Wittenoom

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MEMORANDUM TO MR. M.G. KING

W. K. O. Gyles

18/9/63

A.B.A. WITTENOOM
Industrial Disease (Asbestosis & Silicosis)

Increasing prominence is being given in Western Australia to the incidence of Asbestosis. At the same time, grouping of Silicosis cases on a regional basis has allegedly indicated a large number of cases due to work at Wittenoom.

In 1963 to date, 21 cases of Asbestosis and Silico-Asbestosis have been attributed to Wittenoom. These 21 cases are graded by the Health Department in the following way -

- 1 Asbestosis
- 4 early Asbestosis
- 14 early Silico-Asbestosis
- 2 Silico Asbestosis

Total 21

The State Government Insurance Office has estimated the current liability for industrial disease cases at Wittenoom to be £ 18,000.

This liability is arrived at considering the seriousness of the 21 cases and also considering the maximum liability under the Western Australian Workers Compensation Act of £ 2,400 in any one case, or £ 3,000 if death results. In the event of death, payments already made are deductible from the £ 3,000.

At present, we are paying the State Government Insurance Office a premium of something in excess of £ 5,000 per year for industrial disease insurance cover. In conversation with the General Manager of the State Government Insurance Office, I was informed that the claims experience under this policy was very bad. I was given to understand that he would attempt to have the premium rate increased beyond the present 20/- per £ 100 wages which has been in operation for many years.

In further considering our potential liability, we should bear in mind that in N.S.W. there is no limit to the amount a man may receive by way of weekly compensation for silicosis and on his death, a death claim of £ 4,300 is

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payable in addition to all other payments made to him.

The premium rate for industrial disease (Silicosis) cover for a similar mining operation in N.S.W. is 80/- per £ 100 wages.

Distribution of Industrial Disease Cases.

It seems that 18 of the total 21 cases can be attributed to employment in the mine and 3 cases to employment in the mill.

Prevention of Industrial Disease.

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The only sure way to prevent asbestosis and silicosis is to reduce the concentration of contaminants in the air to a reasonable figure. This is done by improving ventilation.

Regular sampling of air at chosen points is necessary to provide a proper check on the dust concentration.

It is not practical to think in terms of supplying respirators to employees. The hot working conditions make respirators unpopular even in the mill.

General Comments on Asbestosis and Silicosis.

The following details were given by Dr. Letham (Western Australian Director of Public Health) when he recently discussed industrial disease with Mr. Broadhurst and me:

1. A reasonable reading of concentration of asbestos in air would be 140 fibres per c.c. Above this there is danger of contracting Asbestosis.
2. Time taken for a man to be affected by either of the two diseases depends upon the following factors
 - concentration of contaminants in the air
 - rate at which a man works (the volume of air he inhales depends on this)

(- age

3. The critical particle size of asbestos is 20 - 30 microns. With silica, the critical size is less than 2 microns.
4. Asbestosis can cause lung cancer.
5. It is rare for a man to develop asbestosis or silicosis after exposure ceases. If this were to happen, it would be within one or two years after he had been removed from exposure.
6. In its early stages before breathlessness results, development of asbestosis or silicosis can be arrested if the man is removed from exposure. At the stage of breathlessness, the condition cannot be improved.
7. Asbestosis develops earlier than Silicosis because the fibres are deposited in the lung passages and not in the lung sacs as with silicosis.
8. Air sampling is best done with a widgee impinger such as we have at Wittenoom. Places to sample air should be determined after a careful survey of the mine and mill.

SYDNEY
18th September, 1963.

The potential liability is substantial
and I recommend close attention
any assistance will be made available
by the Department Dept.

BhB