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THE FLINTKOTE COMPANY
EAST RUTHERFORD, N. J.

Inter-Office Correspondence

DATE March 13, 1973

TO MESSRS: FROM M.L. Johnson SUBJECT: Asbestos

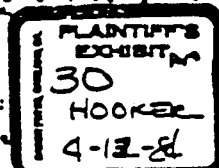
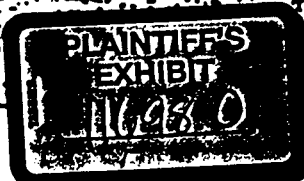
E. A. Opila Chicago Heights (TT)
W. Mortonson Rutherford
L. Sands Chicago Heights (TT)
L. Zizic Chicago Heights (TT)
R. Lozinak Chicago Heights (TT)
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S. Spike Chicago Heights (TT)
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More information from the AIA.

SM
Enc.

B.B.

M.L. Johnson



The hazards of safety

The Editor:

Robert Sherrill's one-sided, sensationalized article, "Asbestos, the savior of lives, has a deadly side" (Jan. 21), contained many errors of fact and interpretation. The following should help clarify a few of his more blatant omissions and distortions.

(1) Because of the long latent period of asbestos-related disease, the disease we find today is not an indication of present conditions but is instead a result of conditions existing decades ago at a time when neither the medical profession, government nor the industry knew very much about the health effects of asbestos and was less about the proper means for their control.

(2) The isolated incidents cited as proof of industry indifference and irresponsibility are not indicative of the overall industry response to this problem. In the past decade alone, the asbestos manufacturing industry has spent approximately \$110-million on

dust control and expects to spend an additional \$95-million over the next few years to achieve complete compliance with the final Department of Labor standards.

(3) No mention was made whatever of the highly respected and extensive medical research which has been sponsored, co-sponsored or corroborated in by the industry through the years, and which has contributed significantly to our knowledge of the biological effects of asbestos. In fact, the Institute of Occupational and Environmental Health, sponsored by the Asbestos Mining Association, is one of the world's largest nongovernmental sources of funds for asbestos-health research.

(4) While Dr. Irving J. Selikoff has certainly made a valuable contribution to our knowledge of asbestos-related disease, it is unfortunate that Dr. Sherrill did not discuss the situation with any of the top authorities in the field since many of them do believe that many of Dr. Selikoff's recent frightening predictions are justified by printed medical data.

(5) The Labor Department decision to delay adoption of the two-fiber standard for an additional two years beyond the two-year implementation period recommended by the National Institute of Safety and Health and the Advisory Committee was approved by Dr. Marcus M. Key, Director of NIOSH, prior to the publication of the standards. Furthermore, Dr. Key is in total disagreement with Dr. Selikoff's prediction that half of all those entering the asbestos industry within the next four years will die because of the delay in going to two fibers.

We believe that the above facts demonstrate quite clearly the incomplete and distorted manner in which Mr. Sherrill presented the asbestos-health situation in his article.

MATTHEW M. SWETONIC,
Executive Secretary,
Asbestos Information
Association

New York

Mr. Sherrill replies:

Even if one is kind enough to accept Mr. Swetonic's figures regarding the amount spent on dust control, the \$110-million comes to less than 2 per cent of the value of asbestos products sold in

the United States during the past 10 years, according to the U. S. Bureau of Census. Considering the health disaster that the dust has created, I don't call a 2 per cent outlay exactly overwhelming.

But before taking Mr. Swetonic's complaints too seriously, one should bear in mind that the Asbestos Information Association is funded by 19 of the nation's largest miners, manufacturers and importers of asbestos and asbestos-containing products, and the association pays Mr. Swetonic to respond almost by rote. For example, after a recent Wall Street Journal article on the hazards of asbestos, he complained, saying it was "incomplete, erroneous, sensationalized and distorted."

Mr. Swetonic's defense arsenal is limited to a few standard blunderbusses.

But when he is not rattling off this non-speak as an industry hack, he can be quite sensible about the problem. In my taped interview with him, I asked, "In general, how does the industry feel about Dr. Selikoff's conclusions relating to the hazards of asbestos?" Did he reply that Selikoff was all wet? No. That Selikoff's mortality figures were cockeyed? No. Mr. Swetonic replied, "The health experience of these people [asbestos workers] has, you know, been a terrible thing and is obviously, you know, quite bad, and I think that when this information first started to come out of Dr. Selikoff's laboratory it was quite shocking to industry, obviously so."

I further asked Mr. Swetonic if he thought the problem was limited to asbestos workers. "No," he said, "I don't think I would go that far. There have been fairly substantial increases of asbestos-related diseases among manufacturing workers, especially textile workers [whose work] has been notoriously dusty. . . ."

As for the complaint that I do not quote enough doctors who are sympathetic with the asbestos industry, well, let's turn to one of Johns-Manville Corp.'s top health consultants, Dr. George W. Wright, for further evidence of the industry's slowness in meeting the problem. In the American Review of Respiratory Disease, October, 1959, Dr. Wright acknowledged that although as early as 1930 scientists "demonstrated that asbestos posed a major threat to the health of workers in the asbestos textile trade" and although subsequent research linked the hazard to other workers, "substantial numbers of persons exposed to asbestos in their occupation have never come under a protective occupational hygiene program."

This is still true, and it is the fault not only of the asbestos industry but, as I made clear in my article, also the fault of a lethargic, stupid element of organized labor and most especially of a