

Mr. W.W.F. Shepherd

AIR MAIL

J. W. ROBERTS LTD., ARMLEY, LEEDS 12, ENG.

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WLD/WL

6th July, 1949

H.A. Williamson Esq.,
The Atlas Asbestos Co., Ltd.,
110, McGill Street,
MONTREAL,
Canada.

Dear Mr. Williamson,

Asbestosis - Canada

Thank you for advising me in yours of the 29th June that we may be hearing from the Provincial Health Department of the Province of Quebec on the subject of risk to health incurred by asbestos spray operators, and when this comes along we shall know what to do.

You will remember I wrote you on the 29th March emphasizing the need to employ our latest type dustless spraying machine, and I take it that the International Health Conference referred to, that was to be held last month, has now taken place. I might add here that this information came to me from Dr. E.H.A. Merewether, Chief Medical Officer, Ministry of Labour & National Services, London. The fact that injury to health has been used as a lever in the recent trouble in the Canadian asbestos mines is probably purely incidental.

I think you should know that we have never had a single case of asbestosis amongst our spray workers, and that every one of our original spray operators still with us is in good health after some 20 years regular work in the process. Whilst I attribute this largely to the care that these men have taken, in addition to the presence of considerable quantities of water vapour when the application is carried out in the proper manner, this is not to say that the old system is entirely safe, as a careless operator can cause a great deal of real dust, and whilst the authorities are of opinion that the operator himself can be protected, they are much more concerned with the health of other workers in the vicinity so that unless you do take prompt measures to advise the authorities of the steps that are being taken to overcome the objection, they may think fit to issue regulations, which once established may cause you very serious and quite unnecessary inconvenience.

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Should you be seeing the authorities on these lines it may be of use to you to know that this Company has been in close touch with the measures taken in this country since the risk was first suspected, and that we were all of us instrumental in the drafting of what eventually became the 1931 Asbestosis Medical Scheme, which scheduled certain operations in the manufacture of asbestos goods, so that the workers concerned are subject to initial and periodical medical examination, as a result of which they may be suspended from further work in any of these scheduled occupations, and the employer was until recently liable to pay compensation. As the date of the scheme indicates, the preparatory work was carried out prior to the development of Spray, which also started to be used in 1931, so that spraying is not a scheduled operation.

More recently the 1931 scheme was embodied in the National Insurance (Industrial Injuries) Act 1946, where all dust diseases, such as silicosis, asbestosis, etc., are covered under the general heading of "pneumoconiosis."

Possibly because Spray was not a scheduled occupation the authorities in London, and particularly Dr. E.H.A. Merewether, have always kept in touch with me, and we recently gave the Doctor a demonstration of dustless spraying methods with which he appeared to be quite satisfied, so that we do not expect any further complication, provided these new methods are promptly adopted. These methods are covered by Canadian Patent Number 446,598 of the 24th February 1948, and Canadian Application Number 571,767 of the 19th February 1948.

If you decide to approach the authorities on your side no doubt you will let me know in the near future, and at the same time inform us how soon you can arrange to replace your existing machines with the new dustless pattern.

Yours sincerely,