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Mr. Dixon pointed out that the report had made no great impact on the public - indeed, it had had a beneficial effect in the sense that it had cleared up some misunderstandings and misconceptions about the environmental effects of asbestos and had thus lowered the emotional temperature. However, the new regulations would probably result in the continued construction of asbestos dumps in some areas.

The proposed new UK standards could be met in the manufacture of asbestos cement, friction materials and textiles, though the industry would want a time extension beyond the proposed implementation date of 1st December 1980. The new standards posed a greater problem for the manufacture of insulation board, millboard and possibly asbestos papers, and for the use of short fibres as fillers.

For the asbestos industry globally, it was concluded that outright bans on asbestos were most unlikely over the next five years except in Scandinavia; and possibly in other countries with regard to crocidolite and amosite. While asbestos cement was probably reasonably secure in most countries, the trends in attitudes and policies towards asbestos and its environmental effects might well have an adverse impact upon certain products, affecting in particular the shorter fibres. Demand for asbestos cement grades in the developing countries should not be significantly affected over the next five years, though some plants need to be brought up to European dust control standards. Substitutes for asbestos will continue to be developed, but companies should not simply "give in" on asbestos. Considerable effort (and expenditure) will be required to support the "asbestos lobby" in Europe at employee/trade union, customer and political levels.

The Market for Asbestos in 1979

The run-down of excess stocks held by many users continued in 1979. Markets thus firmed up although the increase in basic demand for asbestos cement grades in the Far East (excluding Japan) and some African and Middle Eastern countries was only modest. In the non-asbestos cement grades demand was on a more or less level trend. Some pressure had, however, developed on supplies of Group 4's and 5's because of shortfalls in Russian production and a consequent scramble by East European countries for "western" fibres.

There was no sign of an improvement in the underlying trend in demand in 1980 in Western Europe, Japan and North America. However, strong demand from Eastern Europe is likely to continue and further growth is likely in some of the main developing countries. Some supply constraints may develop in Group 4's and 5's even though the expansion at the major Rhodesian mines is now on stream; Canadian mine stocks were historically low at the end of September 1979.

Production Trends

Mr. Dorner tabled an up-dated mine-by-mine production schedule with projections for 1980 and 1985. This was considered with interest by the meeting. It was noted that world chrysotile production was expected to be about 6 million short tons in 1980.

4. Consumption Trends

It was generally agreed that there would be no great change in world demand levels over the medium term. Consumption has been at relatively low levels in most industrialised countries since the 1974/75 world recession, and there could well be further gradual declines. These are expected to be at least offset by increases in consumption in the developing countries.

5. Next Meeting

It was agreed that another meeting should be held in the last week of October 1980 in Brussells. The precise date will be fixed later.