

FILE NAME: Sprayed Asbestos (SPRA)

DATE: 1949

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DOCUMENT DESCRIPTION: Letters RE Canadian Sprayer's Death

0000 0009 1622

Mr. H. A. Williamson

J. W. ROBERTS LTD. ARNLEY, LEEDS 17, ENG.

AIR MAIL

NLD/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.R.A. Merewether, Chief Medical Officer, Ministry of Labour & National Service, 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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Continuation No.1

J. W. ROBERTS LTD. ASBESTOS LISTS INC.

H.A. Williamson Esq.

6th July, 1949

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.R.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 446,898 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, 

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COPY

J. W. ROBERTS LTD. ARMLEY LEEDS 17 ENG

MINISTRY OF HEALTH,
Division of Industrial Hygiene,
1570, St. Hubert Street,
MONTREAL. QUE.

July 11, 1949

J.W. Roberts Ltd.,
Midland Works,
Armley, Leeds, 12.

Attention:- Mr. N.L. Dolbey

Dear Sir,

I was referred to you by Mr. H.A. Williamson of the Atlas Asbestos Company Ltd., Montreal Branch, for further information about your "Sprayed Limpet Asbestos" process.

We actually are interested very much in the use of asbestos under any working conditions, specially regarding the danger of asbestosis. What made me contact your Canadian subsidiary is the fact that the question arises whether the workers employed in the application of insulation by the process mentioned above might not be exposed in such a way as to develop such a disease.

I understand that in England you have been using this process for quite a number of years, whereas in Canada it has been in use since 1935 only.

In your experience in England, did you ever have to pay compensation for asbestosis occurring through the exposure to the dust, produced when applying the asbestos insulation by the above mentioned process. If so, we would be very grateful if you would let us know about the details of such cases that may have occurred.

It is understood that this information will be kept as highly confidential, and that it is not to the detriment of the company, but rather in view of helping in the improvement of the process to reduce the dust if possible in case there is a potential danger for the health of the workers.

Yours very truly,

(sgd)

Sarto R. Plamondon, P.Eng.,

Sanitary Engineer

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AIR

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J. W. ROBERTS LIMITED

(Turner & Newall Ltd.)

MIDLAND WORKS, ARMLEY, LEEDS 12, ENGLAND

London Office
82 VICTORIA STREET,
WESTMINSTER SW1
Tel. Victoria (44)

11th July 1949

Sarto R. Plamondon, Esq.,
Sanitary Engineer,
Ministry of Health,
Division of Industrial Hygiene,
1570 St. Hubert Street,
Montreal, Quebec,
Canada.

Dear Sir,

Thank you very much for approaching us in yours of the 11th on the possible injurious effect to workers operating our asbestos spraying process as used by the Atlas Asbestos Co. Ltd., of Montreal.

The spraying of asbestos is not a scheduled occupation under the 1931 Asbestosis Medical Scheme in this country so that the workers themselves have not been subject to periodic examination, but, nevertheless, we have for many years maintained a very close watch on this question and, as a result, can fairly say that we know of no single case where workmen or women whose only contact with asbestos has arisen through their operation of our asbestos spraying process, have suffered any ill-effect. This includes not only our experience in Great Britain, but that of our other European Licensees, as far as we are aware. This favourable position is, no doubt, assisted by the fact that we insist on all operators being adequately trained before they are allowed to operate the machines and process, so that the creation of dust is minimised and that which is created is surrounded by a considerable amount of "atomized" water.

We have carried out much research work in the course of our efforts to achieve the highest possible elimination of dust and, in this connection, we would draw your attention to the fact that we have recently patented a method of rendering the fibre dustless prior to spraying by evenly damping it with a small amount of water in a specially constructed machine; this is covered by Canadian Patent Number 446,898. Likewise, in order to simplify the obtaining of these beneficial results we have recently applied for a patent for an improved form of spraying machine which damps the fibre automatically, and is covered by Canadian Application Number 571,767.

All our latest type asbestos spray machines incorporate this latest improvement, and we are proceeding as quickly as possible to convert all existing machines, so that we believe the risk when spraying our specially prepared asbestos fibre mixings will be largely discounted in future.

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Continuation No.1

J. W. ROBERTS LTD., ARMLEY, LEEDS 19, ENG.

Sarto R. Plamondon, Esq.

19th July, 1949

The Atlas Asbestos Co. Ltd. have been kept informed of all developments, and henceforth only new type machines will be supplied to them.

Yours faithfully,
J. W. ROBERTS LTD.

H. J. Johnson
Director.

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Mr. W.W.F. Shepherd

AIR MAIL

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

NLD/WL

10th August, 1949

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



Dear Mr. Williamson,

Asbestosis

I now have yours of the 4th instant with further reference to the case of alleged asbestosis developed by a spray operator employed by Messrs. Fleck Brothers, Vancouver. Whilst there appears to be no need for any further direct action with the Department of Industrial Hygiene, I hope that the following comments will be of help in investigating the matter further from a more or less practical angle, because unless we do pay attention to these things they are apt to develop into serious snags.

As we at these Works have been in touch with asbestosis since it was first put forward as an industrial risk - so that we have not only had longer experience, but more time in which to find similar cases - I find it difficult to grasp why the first case amongst spray operators should have been reported from so far away as Vancouver, more particularly in the case of a man who did not do any spraying but merely filled the machine during work on board ship where, because of the difficulty of handling the old heavy machines, these are normally kept on the exposed deck, quite away from the man who is doing the spraying below; if the lid of the machine is kept closed the amount of dust is absolutely negligible, so that he could not possibly accumulate sufficient to give rise to fibrosis of the lung in so short a time. The fact that it has occurred so soon after the dates you give suggests to me that there may be some previous history involved, and it might be worth determining whether the man has previously been engaged in some other dusty occupation, such as mining, flour milling, or loading grain in ships.

The figure of 93 Dollars per month suggests total incapacity, and in passing I wonder whether this is paid by you or by your Government; from the interest they are taking it would seem that the latter is the case.

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Continuation No.1

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

H.A. Williamson Esq.

10th August, 1949

As regards dust counts, these are apt to be misleading, especially as there is seemingly no standardised method in operation, but even so I cannot quite follow what the set of figures quoted is intended to indicate. Some counts which were done by us quite recently, however, show that the reduction in dust resulting from the use of our two new spraying methods are in the order of 14/15ths for the pre-damping method, and 9/10ths when using the continuous damping process in the new machine, as compared with the old method, so that this would bring your own people's figures well below the 300 per c.c. suggested by them as a safe working quantity.

It should be noted here that the maximum allowance of dust, laid down shortly before the War by the American Conference of Governmental Industrial Hygienists, was 5 million particles per cubic foot in the case of asbestos, and 50 million for Portland Cement. (A cubic foot = 28,315 c.c.).

I shall be leaving here at the end of the month, and be away for about four months in South America, so will you please keep in touch with Mr. G.A. Wilson in respect of the supply of new spraying equipment, and should anything fresh arise perhaps we could arrange to deal with it together on my return, especially if I am able to call and see you next year.

The Department of Industrial Hygiene have acknowledged our letter of the 19th July, and you might care to have a copy, which I attach.

Yours sincerely,

Encl: