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Similar letter to : H. C. Armstrong, Comm.Councillor, Metals & Minerals
Office of the High Commissioner for Canada,
1, Grosvenor Square, W.1.

M. J. Brazier, G. A. Brazier & Co. Ltd.,
Newly House, 309, Chase Road, N.14.
Universal Asbestos Manufacturing Co. Ltd.,
Tolpits, Watford, Herts.

5th Flow. 10 Downing St.
25th August 65.

Graham
Lindsell

Mr. James,
Johns Manville & Co. Ltd.,
20, Albert Embankment,
London, S.E.1.

15B 9th August, 1965.

Dear Sir,

ASBESTOS IN BAGS

Following our telephone conversation, I should first explain that the Ocean Shipowners Group Joint Committee is the joint industrial body responsible for working conditions within the Ocean Trades of the Port of London.

At the present time, both sides are concerned over the possible risk of men sustaining Asbestosis. Whilst for some years this fear has existed, it has been brought to a head in the Port of London recently, following gangs employed on a particular vessel obtaining a medical opinion for themselves from Dr. Donald Hunter of the Middlesex Hospital Medical School, and a copy of the letter written by the latter is enclosed.

Since the gangs concerned obtained this advice, the discharge of Asbestos on the vessel has been restricted to approximately one ton per hour, the men being supplied with Siebe Gorman Masks Mark IV.

Whilst that vessel has now been completed, the issue has spread to other vessels subsequently discharged in the Port, as both Trade Unions representing Port Transport Workers have issued their Members certain instructions. These are set out in a circular which I, as Secretary of the Shipowners Organisation, sent to my constituents on 30th July, copy attached.

As when the discharge of the bags of Asbestos is completed, a certain amount of dust will remain, it is understood Dr. Hunter has advised the men to continue wearing the masks and continue the discharge of the other commodities at a reduced output.

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You will appreciate that this will have a grave affect on the importing of Asbestos through the Port of London.

Following a decision of the Joint Committee, a Consultant Bio-Chemist is at the present time examining the dust count in the atmosphere of ships' holds during the course of discharge of the various types of bags which are imported. It is, of course, reasonable to expect that one of the features of his Report will be concerned with a recommendation as to the best type of bag to be used. The question still remains, however, as to whether - whatever is contained in the Report - the men will accept the conclusions reached, in face of the opinion held by Dr. Hunter. Indeed, it may be necessary to submit our Bio-Chemists Report to a Doctor for further comment.

Insofar as the Docks are concerned, it is felt by some Members of my Committee that the risk of Asbestosis is far greater in the processing industry than to dockers, who are only in contact with this commodity in small quantities for short durations at infrequent intervals. It has, therefore, occurred to me that the producers or processors of Asbestos Fibre may have available to them considerable medical information on the risk of Asbestosis, even though it may be limited to the circumstances under which their employees work.

At the same time, it is felt that you might be able to provide me with some useful information on your experience and possibly comment on the risks dockers might run, together with any other useful information which you think may be of assistance to me. It might even be useful to know to what extent employees concerned with mining and processing might have suffered, if such information can be made available.

Whilst the issue at present is restricted to the handling of the raw Asbestos, it has been indicated by one Trade Union that an approved mask should be worn even when handling the manufactured product, such as sheets, pipes, etc. Whilst I personally feel that this view has been taken in the present climate of grave fear over the raw material, and thus may not become a problem, it will be useful if you could also comment on this aspect.

Since the Trade Unions made known their policy to their Members, the reaction has varied in the dock, and whilst where Members of the Transport & General Workers Union

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are solely concerned the discharge has continued not unreasonable, the reaction of the Stevedores to their union's instruction has been to work the commodity at time rate and not piecework, but unfortunately in working to time rate their output has been severely restricted. Furthermore, with this particular category of labour the issue still remains, after the Asbestos is completely discharged, since under the instructions of their Trade Union, following the advice their Members received from Dr. Hunter, they have to continue wearing the masks on other cargo, and as a result, output of those commodities is also seriously restricted.

In conclusion I must once again reiterate my request for any observation or information which you might consider of use to us, in our endeavour to overcome this issue.

Yours faithfully,

(D. L. Bennett)
Secretary

Meeting held at the MINISTRY OF LABOUR, 19 St James' Square, S.W.1. on Thursday, August 12th, 1965 at 3.30 p.m.

PRESENT:	Mr R.K. Christy, C.B.	- Chief Inspector of Factories
	Dr W.D. Buchanan	- Deputy Senior Medical Inspector
	Mr C. Mainwaring	- Deput Chief Inspector - Factories
	Miss L.A. Pittam	- Deputy Inspector - Factories
	Mr A.T. Hatfull - 384.	- Secretary of Safety Health and Welfare Division
	Mr M.A. Simons	- Principal - Safety Health and Welfare Division
	Mr H.C. Armstrong	- Commercial Councillor (Metals and Minerals) Office of the High Commission for Canada
	Mr M.J. Brazier	- A.A. Brazier & Co (Asbestos) Ltd. (representing Asbestos Producers and Merchants)

Whitehall 6200 — Ex 452. MoL St James Sq.

Asbestos and Asbestosis was a subject with which the Factory Inspectors are very much concerned at the present time. It was because of this that the meeting consisted of a number of interested parties, explained Mr Christy in opening the meeting.

Although the present situation at the Docks could not yet be classed as an industrial dispute, the reasons for the slow working were of considerable interest to the Factory Inspectors and the Ministry of Labour.

Mr Christy advised that Asbestos in factories was governed by the 1931 Code of Handling and Processing Asbestos in Factories. The 1934 Act regarding Dock Labour, although explaining various health provisions, did not mention Asbestos. Both these Acts were being revised and there was little doubt that eventually new regulations regarding Dockers working in dusty conditions would be incorporated, with a probable mention specifically of Asbestos and the types of packing that should be used.

Dr Buchanan mentioned that although there were no known cases of Asbestosis in Dockers, the Ministry of Labour had had no legal obligation to investigate and it could be that there were cases of which they had no knowledge.

It has recently been discovered that cancer of the plura (mesothelioma) could be caused by minimal exposure to Asbestos dust. This had been discussed at a Symposium held at the New York Acadamy of Science at the end of 1964. This discovery regarding minimal exposure as against the more classic causes of Asbestosis, is the chief reason for the increased activities of the Factory Inspector in this country at Asbestos manufacturers plants. They had found that one of the worst spots at the majority of plants was the warehouse. The Factory Inspectors were pressing for an impermeable bag.

Mr C.B. Selby Boothroyd of the Board of Trade, had written to the Ministry of Labour, stressing the gravity of the situation at the London Docks and the fears that if imports of Asbestos were banned, then such essential industries as the motor car and building trades, vital to the British economy, would stop working and many thousands of workers laid off; also vital export trade would be lost.

It now transpires that one branch of a Union at the London Docks took it on themselves to retain Dr Hunter in view of the dusty conditions on the "EMEZK" which was discharging Russian Asbestos. This Asbestos was packed "loose filled jute bags" and Dr Hunter's comments regarding the danger to health from Asbestos dust, and the handling of Asbestos cargos under certain conditions, were made on this visit alone. He had not seen the other types of packaging from other Asbestos Producers being unloaded at London Docks. Unfortunately the Unions sent the directive to their Members quoting"Asbestos in all types of packs" and this has resulted in the present "time work only" ruling. Under piecework, a gang could be expected to clear an average of 30 - 35 tons per hour. On a time work basis they are only working about 1 ton per hour instead of a more normal 8 - 10 tons per hour on time work.

Dr Hunter has left for a Lecture Tour of South America and will not be returning until the end of September. The Ministry of Labour are trying to contact one of his associates (Dr G. Kazantzies).

Dr Buchanan is going to arrange for tests to be taken at the Docks, of the dust content in the hold when unloading. They would also inspect the types of packaging. Their Report would state whether they consider Asbestos in types of impermeable packs, i.e. paper and jute laminated bags, reduced the dust danger level to what could be called a normal industrial risk.

Mr Christy advised that he was fully aware of the damage caused by the Dockers using hooks.

It was stressed that the Asbestos Producers had been working on the dust problem for a number of years, particularly on the question of bagging, and the Factory Inspectors themselves had been able to see the encouraging results at various Factories. The difficulty is to find a suitable bag which would withstand the multiple handlings in transit. Considerable progress had been made with shipments of Asbestos in paper bags, particularly for the shorter grades, becoming common. There is still the problem of the dust caused by a paper bag breaking and this occurred in most cases during unloading at the London Docks due to hooks or rough handling by the Dockers. The use of slings instead of nets and trays was another cause of bags breaking. It was felt that jute-paper laminated bags might be a satisfactory answer and they were pleased to learn that trial shipments were coming forward.

It was hoped that the whole problem would be solved before it became an industrial dispute and the Ministry of Labour was quite willing to arrange a meeting with the Dockers, Medical representatives, Shippers and ourselves if this would be of assistance when the reports are completed.