

FILE NAME: Johns-Manville (JMA)

DATE: 1966

DOC#: JMA379

DOCUMENT DESCRIPTION: Tile Corp of America, FMC Letters

September 15, 1966

Dr. J. V. Fitzgerald
General Director
The Council of America Inc.
P.O. Box 326
Princeton, N. J. 08540

Dear Dr. Fitzgerald:

It was with considerable embarrassment that I opened my mail this morning and found that you had written to our corporation last March, asking for certain information concerning the use of asbestos associated with the tile industry. I am sure that you will accept my humble apologies for the tardiness of this reply. Last spring, I was away from the office for many months because of illness and thought that all inquiries such as yours had been answered during my absence. I am sure there has been an oversight in our operations and only today did your letter come to my attention. I trust that I shall be able to rectify our mistakes and please believe that I shall do everything to cooperate and give you all desired information.

In your letter you referred to a newspaper article quoting Dr. Solikoff and various asbestos hazards. You specifically requested information concerning potential health hazards for employees in certain factories who were making the tiles and the tile asbestos at their occupations. As you are probably aware the main subject of dispute associated with asbestos fiber is popular with certain impressionable writers and throughout numerous news media. As an individual physician I can say only that people who have not had extensive experience with the health of asbestos workers should employ caution in their reporting of alleged adverse conditions. I only can quote my own experience and hope that this will be accepted as face value.

I have been associated with the operations of our fiber mine and mill at Asbestos, Quebec, for nearly a quarter of a century. We have about 2000 people there and are producing approximately 600,000 tons of chrysotile fiber per year. Because of excellent working conditions, proper dust control and intelligent material handling methods we have developed no new cases of asbestosis for a long period of time. There is practically no tuberculosis, and the incidence of non-malignant respiratory diseases among the employees is no greater than that among those not exposed to fiber. As far as lung cancer is concerned, the incidence among our employees is lower than that in the general population as reported by Brown and Tannen in the "Epidemiological Study of Industrial Inhalation" - June 1953. This study included not only our employees but also all others in the mines and mills of the Asbestos, Quebec area.

PRODUCED
IN - 83

(5)

September 15, 1945

Your question specifically indicated water works and tile systems. In my understanding, there is only a small percentage of asbestos found in the water. Even in dry states, this material there was a considerable cloud of asbestos contamination. I do not believe there would be a serious health hazard. With ordinary good working conditions I can see no problem for as I have indicated when we are producing approximately 2/3 million tons of pure silica in one mill each year we have no pulmonary problems. My belief is that with good working conditions management, unions and employees can be reassured that they are not exposed to serious health hazards. Gain information over the health hazards and longevity of the large group of people in the tile industry should be another reassuring factor.

Once again I must offer my apologies for the delay in this reply. If additional information is required, I can promise that you will receive such before attention in the future. I shall be most pleased to visit you to discuss this in Princeton or elsewhere at any time you and your associates should desire.

Sincerely,

Herbert W. Smith, M.D.
General Director

cc: H. K. Doll
H. K. Hendry, Asbestos
H. G. Donovan, Mindanao

PRODUCED
JM - 83

September 15, 1966

Dr. J. V. Fitzgerald
Research Director
Tile Council of America, Inc.
P. O. Box 326
Princeton, N. J. 08540

Dear Dr. Fitzgerald:

It was with considerable embarrassment that I opened my mail this morning and found that you had written to our commission last March, asking for certain information concerning the use of asbestos associated with the tile industry. I do hope that you will accept my humble apologies for the tardiness of this reply. Last spring, I was away from the office for many months because of illness and thought that all inquiries such as yours had been answered during my absence. Somewhere there has been an oversight in our operations and only today did your letter come to my attention. I trust that I shall be able to rectify our mistakes and please believe that I shall do everything to cooperate and give you all desired information.

In your letter you referred to a newspaper article quoting Dr. Selikoff and various asbestos hazards. You specifically requested information concerning potential health hazards for employees in mortar factories who were making the dry mix and the tile setters at this occupations. As you are probably aware the whole subject of disease associated with asbestos fiber is popular with certain [*] writers and throughout numerous news media. As an individual physician I can say only that people who have not had extensive experience with the health of asbestos workers should employ caution in their reporting of alleged [disease ?] conditions. I only can quote my own experience and hope that this will be accepted at face value.

I have been associated with the operations of our fiber mine and mill at Asbestos, Quebec, for nearly a quarter of a century. We have about 2000 people there and are producing approximately 600,000 tons of chrysotile fiber per year. Because of excellent working conditions, proper dust control and intelligent material handling methods we have developed no new cases of asbestosis for a long period of time. There is practically no tuberculosis, and the incidence of nonoccupational respiratory diseases among the employees is no greater than that among those not exposed to fiber. As far as lung cancer is concerned, the incidence among our [*] is lower than that in the general population as reported by Braun and Truan in "An Epidemiological Study of Industrial Health" - June 1958. This study (*) not only our employees but [*] all others in the mines and mills of the [*], Quebec area.

Your question specifically indicated mortar workers and tile setters. It is my understanding that there is only a small percentage of asbestos fiber in the mortar, [*] it is dry mixing this material there was a considerable cloud of [* * *] I do not believe there would be a serious health hazard. Under ordinary good working conditions I can see no problem for as I have indicated when we are producing approximately 2/3 million tons of pure fiber in one mill each year we have no pulmonary problems. My belief is that with good working conditions management, union and employees can be reassured that they are not exposed to serious health hazards. [* *] over the health [*] and [*] of the large group of people in the tile industry should be another reassuring factor.

Once again I must offer my apologies for the delay in this reply. If additional information is required, I can promise that you will receive much better attention in the future. I shall be most pleased to visit you to discuss this in Princeton or elsewhere at any time you and your [associates?] should desire.

Sincerely

Kenneth W. Smith, MD
Medical Director

(blind copy to 3 individuals

(copy attached to Hood's letter appears to have been sent to J. Hendry, Asbestos)

August 18, 1966

Mr. O. A. Battista
Feed Machinery Corp.
Research & Development Center
Route 1
Princeton, New Jersey

Dear Mr. Battista:

Recently you spoke to our Mr. H. G. Donovan concerning potential health hazards in the handling of asbestos fiber. Mr. Donovan has asked me to reply for him.

It is a recognized fact that continued inhalation of asbestos fiber in sufficient quantities over a long enough period of time may cause some pulmonary changes. However, in our mines and mills where approximately two thousand people are producing in excess of 500,000 tons of asbestos annually, we have developed no new cases of asbestosis for many years. While I do not have the exact figures on the incidence of asbestosis in this country I know that there are relatively few cases. With simple control measures it is possible to eliminate a potential hazard.

We believe that proper material handling methods as well as local ventilation will remove any health hazard which might exist. A maximum allowable concentration of asbestos fiber in the working atmosphere has been established at 5 million particles per cubic foot of air. If working conditions are such that these suggestions cannot be followed, employees should wear respirators which are approved by the U. S. Bureau of Mines for pneumoconiosis-producing dusts. To prove that we have no deleterious exposures in the working area we carry out physical examinations and chest x-rays on our employees each year. This program has shown us that with proper control in the working area, we do not develop cases of asbestosis.

We all are aware that recently there was a considerable amount of publicity concerning asbestos fiber and cancer in various news media. The basic study of two groups of insulation workers, using all types of insulating materials in many different ways, was made some time ago. This same report has been used on numerous occasions in various publications and at different meetings.

We do not believe that the so-called facts which were reported are basically correct. In the first place, the men examined were called "asbestos workers" because they belonged to the Asbestos Workers Union. It was inferred that all these men were exposed to asbestos fiber. We know that this is not correct. The report ignored the fact that the men examined were exposed to many other potentially toxic materials and simply blamed everything on the asbestos fiber.

PRODUCED
JM - 83

I personally do not believe that there is a serious health hazard associated with the use of asbestos particularly the chrysotile variety. Having worked in most phases of the asbestos industry for nearly a quarter of a century, I have seen no indication that an extensive health hazard exists. We have observed the health of more than 2000 employees in our large asbestos mine and mill in Quebec during this period where we are producing nearly 3/4 million tons of fiber per year. It is my firm belief that, when reasonable working conditions are maintained and materials are handled properly no health problems will exist.

If there are any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Very truly yours,

Kenneth W. Smith, M.D.
Medical Director

cc: E. H. Ball
H. G. Donovan
J. E. Connor, Philadelphia Office