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December 27, 1945

Mr. G. E. Gregory

cc: Mr. W. P. Zimmerman
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Mr. J. E. Thomas
Mr. Wm. E. Page - Y & R

PUBLIC RELATIONS ANGLES IN
BRANCH AND DIVISION POST-WAR SURVEY

Attached is a detailed summary of references in the Post-War questionnaire to Fiberglas-asbestos admixtures and the itch problem.

Branch and Division men almost unanimously urge further development of glass and asbestos admixtures to broaden the electrical and fabrics markets. And they indicate that product improvement to reduce or eliminate the itch is imperative if we are to compete successfully in markets where Fiberglas wool products possess desired engineering characteristics.

Following are observations on some public relations angles of these comments. I am glad to report them to you at your request.

Admixtures with Asbestos. In formulating our policy on admixtures with asbestos, we should keep on the alert because otherwise we will run the risk of smearing Fiberglas with the hazards of exposure to asbestos.

Fabrication of asbestos (in both textile and non-textile forms) is a dusty process, and exposure to asbestos fly involves the danger of asbestosis, a pathological lung condition somewhat like silicosis. This hazard is minimized by use of hoods and exhaust systems and wearing of respirators: the asbestos fabricating industry has learned by the hard way how to control it. More significant, fabrication of textile asbestos involves a skin hazard. Persons handling asbestos yarns in carding, drafting, twisting and plying operations and in warping and weaving -- wherever the material may pass through the fingers at high speed -- may acquire skin lesions known as "asbestos corns" caused by the embedding of the scale-like asbestos fiber into the skin.

The asbestos manufacturing industry is well acquainted with these hazards, and its workers are conditioned to them and are supplied with adequate protective devices. It follows that any extensive Fiberglas asbestos cloth manufacturing program might well be subcontracted to established asbestos fabricators. Such a course would avoid our having to set up asbestos fabricating facilities of our own and would prevent exposing our people to such hazards, which might adversely affect our compensation ratings and disability experience. My suggestion is therefore that the handling of asbestos in combination with Fiberglas be dissociated from our own manufacturing.

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The Itch Problem. Although our files are fully documented with medical references and other data to demonstrate that exposure to Fiberglas materials involves no disabling injuries or disease, we have long recognized that the handling of Fiberglas wool products does involve some skin discomfort. Sharp-pointed slugs and unfiberized spicules have enough structural strength to penetrate the skin and to cause a distressing itch. Medical authorities define this effect as a "non-disabling trauma" which is transitory and superficial, and it has been demonstrated 1.) that workers soon become accustomed to the material and handle it

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without difficulty if they stick on the job long enough to build an immunity and 2.) that when the mental hazard is removed, washing before meals and at the end of each shift with plenty of mild soap and warm water, use of calamine lotion containing one per cent phenol as an anti-pruritic, and sometimes use of a cleanser containing a wetting agent (such as Lan-O-Klean, which is corncob impregnated with lanolin) ordinarily suffice.

Since May 1941 our health program has been built on these premises:

1. Find out the facts. (Our files have been centralized, complete related data have been assembled on insurance experience, investigations have been carried out: Siebert, Sulzberger, Schwartz, Schols, etc.)

2. Get the facts into medical literature. (Articles have been published in Industrial Medicine, American Journal of Surgery, Journal of the American Medical Association, Industrial Hygiene Digest, etc.)

3. Take the mystery out of the subject by making the facts available to members of our own organization and to the general public. ("Health Aspects" has been published and reprints of articles in medical journals made available for general distribution.)

4. Handle inquiries promptly and fully. (All bona fide inquiries have been answered with custom-made replies. Forms have been avoided.)

5. Concentrate on professional and technical "influence centers" — Medical groups, safety engineers, industrial hygienists, plant physicians and nurses, public health authorities. These contacts have been and are being cultivated.

This has been a slow process of education. Frequently Branch men have been under the suspicion of being devil's advocates to get the order, and their talk about the absence of the health hazard has been discounted. Some Branch men, too, not familiar enough with our health story to tell it in a forthright and accurate manner, still reflect a defeatist attitude about the itch and local competitive conditions sometimes frustrate them.

* * * * * *

Our efforts to combat the itch may be adequate in a seller's market; it is a certainty that they will be inadequate in a Post-War buyer's market. In some cases we have been like the Dutch boy at the dike, trying to stem a competitive avalanche that threatens to engulf us. We can point with pride, however, to the consistent effort we have made to treat the subject on its merits. We have nothing to hide, nothing to conceal. And where the itch has been a sales obstacle apparently ruling our materials out of a job, the real reason has lain deeper, in a complex of local and national manufacturing, distribution, and application methods.

Behind such situations lies the fact that the Asbestos Workers Union has had a long and perhaps unholy alliance with the magnesia manufacturers. Evidence in our files demonstrates

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that the Asbestos Workers have been stimulated by some magnesia manufacturers to insist on wage premiums in the handling of Fiberglas. Since the asbestos workers profess to consider each local autonomous, the Union's international officers have passed the word along that each local must decide for itself whether handling Fiberglas involves a health hazard and whether, as a result, the local members will ask a premium wage for handling Fiberglas -- subject only to the International's prohibition against a premium wage on a "defense" job. The restriction imposed by the International of course convicts this policy as inconsistent on its face, since Fiberglas cannot be "safe" to handle on "defense" or "war" jobs where Uncle Sam might be interested and "unsafe" on private jobs. Be that as it may, a chaotic wage rate situation has developed. Premiums ranging from 25¢ to $1.00 per hour are demanded by some locals, none by others. Even though premium labor costs might still make it possible for a contractor to bid on applied job at a price under competitive materials, such a practice is impractical for at least three reasons:

1. The Labor Board will not approve.

2. It implies that a hazard does exist.

3. The precedent established would be difficult if not impossible to upset.

Back of this situation lie our distributing arrangements in the industrial insulation field. Creation of industrial marketers was a step fully justified at the time it was undertaken to break into the market. But since that time, it has become apparent that, next to the magnesia manufacturers themselves, the strongest factor in the market is the contract applicator, who gets the best price from the manufacturer, and who bids and applies the job. Contract applicators handling Fiberglas must buy at 50 off list through the Fiberglas industrial marketer who gets 60 off list. Undoubtedly many of these applied Fiberglas contractors are satisfied with this arrangement. But their own competitors -- other contract applicators getting the best price direct from the magnesia manufacturers -- see in our use of marketers in the distribution setup a threat to their own situations, and whether on their own behalf or at the behest of the magnesia manufacturers, are the stimulating the asbestos workers (with whom they live and work in very close relationship) to use an imagined health hazard to embarrass the Fiberglas contract applicator.

Thus to clean this situation, we will be obliged to 1.) reexamine the raison d'etre of an industrial marketer, 2.) to decide whether his present discount is equitable, in view of the economic functions he performs, as compared with the discount given the contract applicator, and 3.) to determine whether we can set up sufficient contract applicators to cover the market.

Another factor is the longstanding grievance of the Asbestos Workers' Union that no settlement ever has been made by Corning Glass Works on the dispute over the job done at Corning by Manville-owned Smith Murray Company of Rochester. Corning's recent A.F.L. affiliation may have some bearing on this. Both Mr. Hosier and Mr. Cramble assured me in Corning recently that a settlement can be made at any time that payment can be made be a bona fide charity.

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Summary:

Manufacture, fabrication, application of Fiberglas materials involve no hazard attributable to Fiberglas as differentiated from other materials. That point is well established. Handling of the wool materials sometimes involves skin discomfort commonly called "the itch." This is a non-disabling condition that ordinarily is overcome by good body hygiene.

But competitive conditions have brought about a situation wherein the itch has become a major drawback, and we are often unable to discuss the itch characteristics objectively in a competitive sales situation. Especially in the industrial insulation market competitors have used it to embarrass us by stirring up the Asbestos Workers to demand premium wages for applying Fiberglas. Introduction of Fiberglas industrial marketers is unorthodox distribution in this market and has disturbed the contract applicators, who see in it a threat to their position. The lack of a Corning settlement, too, still disgruntles the Union, which refuses to believe we are not closely related to Corning.

Recommendations:

1. Continue our basic health program as outlined above. This is fundamental educational work.

2. Intensify product and process improvement activities to reduce slug content of wool products.

3. Reexamine industrial marketer functions and discounts and relationship of contract applicators and determine ways and means to establish more applied contractors to cover the market.

4. Bring about a settlement by Corning with the Asbestos Workers at the earliest opportunity.

5. Improve relationships with the Asbestos Workers' Union by closer contacts through contract applicators.

These recommendations are based on the belief that "the itch" is not an isolated problem to be solved alone by product improvement; rather, it provides a convenient, though spurious, starting point for anti-Fiberglas conspiracy by the Asbestos Union Workers who are the instruments of the manufacturers and contract applicators.

Edward C. Anne

CA/bk

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[Verbatim Transcript]

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ECA/blr

Edward C. Ames

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