

FILE NAME: Eternit (ETER)

DATE: 1968 Feb 6

DOC#: ETER082

DOCUMENT DESCRIPTION: Letter RE 'Problems Arising from the Use of Asbestos'

10/25

20th February, 1966.

Mr. Ole Hermann Pedersen,
Tolmevej 4,
København,
Denmark.

Dear Mr. Hermann Pedersen,

I was very pleased to receive your letter of 27th January, telling me that you had bought some copies of "Problems arising from the use of Asbestos" when you visited London. As I said when we met in Malmø, we in England consider this to be an excellently prepared document putting in their true perspective the facts concerning the health hazards associated with asbestos and I hope that you will find it useful.

As requested, I have already despatched to you, via Mr. Algreen-Petersen, 24 copies of each of our Codes of Practice, which you should have received by the time you get this letter. These documents have been welcomed by asbestos users over here and I am pleased to read that you propose to distribute them among your colleagues and others concerned. I would emphasise that these Codes are freely available and if you require any further copies I will be pleased to supply them.

I feel that we had a very worthwhile discussion on 11th January and venture to hope, in view of the final sentence of your letter, that you found it so also. The object of my visit was not to convince you that there was no health risk in handling asbestos, but to put the problem in its proper perspective, based on the best information available. To this end, I made the following main points:-

1. The disease asbestosis has been known to the industry for many years. It is generally contracted as a result of prolonged exposure to high concentrations of asbestos dust. While people suffering from asbestosis have an increased risk of developing lung cancer, evidence of lung cancer occurring due to asbestos exposure without asbestosis has never been confirmed. Where the amount of asbestos dust is controlled as in the British asbestos manufacturing industry, asbestosis becomes very rare and in consequence the incidence of lung cancer becomes no

/Smith

26 February, 1966.

greater than in the general population.

2. Mesothelioma is a rare malignant tumour of the pleura or peritoneum, the origin of which is still obscure. Exposure to certain kinds of asbestos dust is suspected of being one cause, but there is no direct proof - only a statistical association which appears to be mainly with crocidolite (blue asbestos). This is not used in ship's board or pipe insulation materials. It was blue asbestos which was concerned in the Newhouse and Thompson study and it is now believed that some of the "neighbourhood" cases were more heavily exposed than was at first thought.
3. There is no evidence that the "pleural plaques" found in the anthophyllite areas of Finland lead to malignancy.
4. The new British Asbestos Regulations, now in preliminary draft form, are not intended to prohibit working with asbestos. Their main effect will not be to make existing controls stiffer, but to ensure that the present standards which have proved to be so successful in asbestos factories are more widely applied. The Codes of Practice already sent to you have been devised to cover these wider applications.

I think we are both aware that some of the above comments conflict with the statements made by Dr. Karvonen. I am sorry that he had already left W.H.O. and I was therefore unable to talk with him. I was, however, privileged to have a very valuable meeting with Dr. Crut, in which we reached a large measure of agreement on the subject of asbestos and health. As I mentioned to you, I expect that some of the views expressed at the New York Conference in 1964 will be modified in Dresden in April and I hope to meet Dr. Crut again on that occasion.

Once more, may I thank you for your courtesy in receiving Mr. Algreen-Petersen and myself. If I can be of any further assistance, I will be only too pleased to hear from you.

Yours sincerely,

R. Nelson.