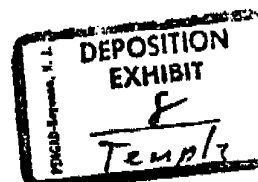




JOHN P. SULLIVAN, JR.
PRESIDENT
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

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MURPHY
FILES
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BATH IRON WORKS CORPORATION
SHIPBUILDERS AND ENGINEERS
SUBSIDIARY OF CONGOLLEUM CORPORATION
BATH, MAINE 04530



August 10, 1978

Mr. John K. Murphy
Executive Editor
Maine Sunday Telegram
390 Congress Street
Portland, Maine 04101

To the Editor:

During the past several weeks, the news media in Maine and nationally have given prime-time television and front-page newspaper attention to the hazards associated with asbestos materials in the shipbuilding industry. The degree of coverage which this subject is receiving nationally and within the State of Maine as related to the Bath Iron Works and the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard prompts me to describe in clear and precise terms exactly what our company's position is and has been with respect to the use and control of this hazardous material in shipbuilding applications at Bath.

Prior to 1945, the medical profession identified asbestos as a potential problem in asbestos mines and related industries. Concerned that similar problems might exist in shipbuilding, the Navy in 1945 launched a study of asbestos pipecovering. Bath was one of the shipyards that participated in this pioneering research. That study, conducted in five shipyards, concluded that asbestos as applied in shipbuilding did not pose a serious health problem. However, as a result of recommendations of that preliminary research, BIW provided better working conditions and ventilation to reduce the dustiness in the work environment.

By 1965, BIW had become concerned that medical problems among some long-term BIW employees might be related to exposure to asbestos materials over an extended period of time. Management therefore retained the services of the Harvard School of Public Health to conduct an extensive study of BIW employees to determine conclusively whether or not extensive exposure to asbestos dust was a health hazard. BIW's union and employees were fully informed of the necessity for this series of tests and there was cooperation on the part of all involved as the examinations were conducted and the results analyzed. Unlike the earlier study, the 1965 study did confirm that an accumulation of asbestos dust over an extended period of time (possibly 20 to 30 years) could in some individuals create serious medical problems.

Mr. John K. Murphy

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Upon receipt of this information, in 1965, Bath Iron Works implemented very strict controls over the use of asbestos in all areas throughout the shipyard. Management also began a program intended to convince ship buyers that asbestos must be eliminated from all future new construction contracts.

In addition, BIW implemented a program which has continued since 1965 which requires annual chest x-rays of BIW employees who had been subjected to exposure to asbestos dust during their earlier employment with the shipyard.

In 1968, Bath's management, in concert with the shipyard's labor union, took a very aggressive posture in approaching the Maine Legislature and requesting that asbestosis be included among those diseases which were compensable under Workmen's Compensation laws. As a result of this joint management/union request, the Legislature that year modified the Workmen's Compensation laws and asbestosis has been covered as a compensable disease under the State's laws since that time.

While some current and former BIW employees may still suffer from asbestosis as a result of exposure to asbestos dust during World War II and prior to 1965, management is convinced that the safety practices invoked in 1965 have eliminated any harmful exposure since that time and bring the shipyard into full compliance with all government regulations applying to the use of asbestos materials. Among the actions taken are the following:

1. All asbestos dust causing material has been eliminated from new ship construction projects.
2. Significant expenditures were made in the 1965 time frame in shops where asbestos materials were cut to ensure that conditions meet minimum health requirements.
3. On older ships undergoing overhaul and repair in spaces where asbestos materials are being ripped out, precautions are taken to restrict areas where such work is being accomplished so that only those properly equipped can work in the restricted spaces.
4. Employees have been thoroughly briefed on the hazards associated with asbestos materials.
5. Employees working in restricted areas where asbestos dust is present are required to use respirators and wear protective clothing in compliance with government regulations.

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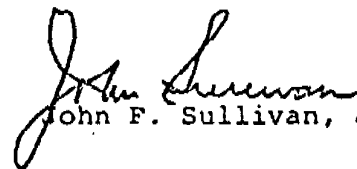
6. Those working in areas where asbestos dust is present routinely wear monitoring devices which sample air quality to assure that minimum safe levels are not exceeded.
7. Proper ventilation is applied during the rip-out and cleanup in restricted areas.

All of these procedures are monitored by BIW supervisors, including the company Safety Department and laboratory technicians, to ensure that there is no harmful level of exposure to asbestos dust. We are convinced that since 1965 harmful exposure to asbestos dust has been eliminated.

It is very unfortunate that some BIW employees who worked in this shipyard several decades ago may still develop medical problems as a result of asbestos. Unfortunately, it now appears that if not properly handled, asbestos (like many other materials) could have harmful effects on the human body. Once such information was made known in the mid 1960's, however, you may be assured that the shipyard's management acted with dispatch and out of a sincere interest to protect the health of its employees from that point forward. We have succeeded in eliminating all asbestos dust causing material in new ship construction and will continue to police very rigorously those areas where asbestos must be handled on older ships today to assure that all safety requirements are properly invoked.

It should be stressed that we acted long before the Federal Government, through OSHA, ordered the first OSHA Emergency Asbestos Standard, December 7, 1971. The safety of individual employees continues to be one of management's paramount concerns.

Sincerely,


John F. Sullivan, Jr.

cc: Mr. Donald C. Hansen
Editorial Page Editor