

Asbestos firm set own fibre standards

By LINDA CAHILL
Star Staff Reporter

George Barge, president of Atlas Asbestos Co., says "a large number" of his 305 employees have asbestos-related diseases, but the company has spent \$300,000 since 1970 to eliminate the cause of such diseases.

In a letter submitted to Judge Rene Beaudry, head of a government inquiry investigating safety conditions in the asbestos industry, Mr. Barge said that since 1970, his company has worked to reduce the asbestos fibre count to two fibres per cubic centimetre of air.

"We undertook, as responsible managers, a self-imposed lower standard of two fibres per cubic centimetre and we have attained that standard," Mr. Barge wrote in the letter, a copy of which was obtained by THE MONTREAL STAR.

Mr. Barge complained that the testimony of former company physician Dr. Philippe Landry led to "misunderstandings" and "misleading publicity."

Dr. Landry had told the government inquiry, set up to determine

whether the government proposal for an asbestos limit of five fibres per cubic centimetre of air as of 1973 is adequate, that asbestos-processing industries should limit fibres to two fibres per cubic centimetre.

Quebec has no fibre limit. Asbestos dust fibres inhaled during long periods of time produce lung-scarring known as asbestosis that can cause death and can lead to other diseases, including cancer.

Without naming Atlas Asbestos Co., Dr. Landry had said that between 1967 and 1974, he had examined 454 employees at a company with which he was associated. He said 15 of 18 employees who died within that period suffered from asbestos-related diseases, including cancer, and another 150 were placed on workmen's compensation for asbestos-related diseases.

Latest figures show 139 Atlas employees receive workmen's compensation.

Mr. Barge complained in his letter that his company was "easily identified" by Dr. Landry's testimony as the place where the workers died and the impression given by the testimony was that Atlas has "no real concern about the health of its employees, and this is not true."

"I refer you to Dr. Philippe Duval and Dr. Fernand Giguere, officials of the Quebec Workmen's Compensation Commission, who are aware of our deep concern and activities to improve health standards in our plant."

"With the evidence of our achievements in dust control, we resent any implication of apathy towards the health of Atlas employees...." he said.

Mr. Barge added that industry knowledge of the asbestos hazards and control methods had "not been too far advanced" before 1970 when the firm undertook its control measures.

He said the firm agreed with most recommendations Dr. Landry had made to the commission, including medical examinations of workers, an asbestos dust limit of two fibres per cubic centimetre for the type of asbestos-cement manufacture done by his Montreal firm, visits by government inspectors and availability of air-test results to workers.

These are already in effect, he said, adding that the company took 441 dust counts in 1974, and 377 so far this year.

None of these counts was over five fibres per cubic centimetre and most were under two fibres, he said.

The company president said his firm uses Chrysotile and Amosite asbestos, not Crocidolite asbestos, in its manufacturing processes.

Chrysotile, while asbestos, is considered the least dangerous asbestos fibre and is the only one mined in Quebec, according to the Quebec Asbestos Mining Association. Crocidolite, blue asbestos, is considered the most dangerous and Amosite, brown asbestos, is between the two, according to studies quoted in an association brief to the Beaudry committee.

Mr. Barge said his company has no evidence Amosite is more dangerous than Chrysotile but if so, it will be eliminated.

PLAINTIFFS
EXHIBIT
JUN 2087

Dr. H.C. Levinsohn,
Rochdale.

Mr. G. Barge,
Atlas Asbestos Company,
Division of Bellis Asbestos Mines
Ltd.,
5600 Hochelaga St. Montreal H1M 1V1

HCL/ES
To : GB
Copy : DWH/RAW/HSDH

15th December, 1975

Dear George,

Further to my letter to you of 25th November, I should like to enquire whether it would be convenient to you for me to come to Montreal on Monday, 26th, after concluding my discussions with Mr. Steen in Vancouver.

I am enclosing herewith for your information a photocopy of my draft itinerary thus far. I should like to stay in Montreal until the 28th January, when I depart for Trumbull in Connecticut to spend a couple of days at the Corporate Headquarters of Raybestos Manhattan. I propose to leave the U.S.A. on 31st January to return home. If these arrangements meet with your approval, will you kindly let me know as speedily as possible so that I might finalise my travel arrangements. Could you also please suggest ways and means of getting from Vancouver to Montreal and Montreal to Connecticut.

Wishing you the compliments of the Season.

Kind regards,

Yours sincerely,

H.C. Levinsohn,

PS.

Your letter of 9th December 1975 received today. I trust that the time allocated from the 26th to 28th of January will be long enough. Could you please let me know urgently so that I can finalise my travel arrangements.

HCL