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INSTITUTE OF OCCUPATIONAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

A REVIEW OF BACKGROUND AND PROJECTS SPONSORED

BACKGROUND

The Institute of Occupational and Environmental Health was established by the Quebec Asbestos Mining Association in 1986 with the objective of assessing the biological effects of asbestos on the health of the asbestos worker, the latter in many instances operating in a working environment where asbestos fibre has become increasingly associated, if not sometimes merged, with many other substances and this under changing conditions of circumstance, time and place.

Although the Quebec Asbestos Mining Association had in the past done its share in the field of industrial health and hygiene, it was nevertheless becoming evident that new health problems were mounting and this to a point that only the implementation of an adequate long range scientific research program could bring light to the question. Such a research program had to be planned and evolved so that the needed points of comparison all over the world would be investigated, true as it is that asbestos fibre is reaching now into so many varieties of uses and commodities and at the

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- 2 -

same time becoming more and more of strategic, if not of essential, value to humanity.

Over the years, imputations have periodically been levelled at the Asbestos Industry as a whole, in the field of mining, milling, manufacturing and processing or in some specific building trades (such as that of insulation materials sprayers.) Even the mere user of asbestos (the consumer) was being singled out as subjected to serious hazards of exposure.

It was felt that the Q.A.M.A. should take immediate steps so as to seek and coordinate all possible information and data over the whole world in connection with the asbestos and health problem, whilst establishing and maintaining contacts with (and sometimes enrolling into the process) such bodies or agencies which were already at work or susceptible of becoming constructive parts of the study.

Accordingly, the Q.A.M.A. decided it should carry a substantial share of this responsibility and devote much of its resources, time and energy in that direction, even if the search into the causes of the changes in the health conditions of workers examined

should not happen to impugn specifically chrysotile asbestos as such.

Hitherto the concern as to the health of the worker in the chrysotile mining industry has included the development and maintenance of preventive industrial measures and safeguards of proven effectiveness and the provision of adequate medical services through organized industrial clinics. These were established in the early thirties in Asbestos and in the mid-forties in Thetford Mines and were supported by such consultants and advisors as the Trudeau Laboratory (Saranac, N.Y.) directed by Doctor Leroy U. Gardner, an eminent pathologist and industrial health pioneer, professor Anthony J. Lanza (New York University) and professor J.A. Vidal, a Canadian pneumologist.

Whilst the Association did not and still does not believe that asbestos problems threaten the general public (it seems that some are rather occupational and not environmental) it could see that one avenue that could lead to a sound and thorough quest into the possible causes and ways to redress such a situation was the enlisting of a competent team of research people to investigate,

advise, recommend and SET IN MOTION a plan of scientific research worldwide in scope.

This ambitious scheme has over the past eight years been pursued with the guidance of the Institute of Occupational and Environmental Health Scientific Committee, under the vigorous and enlightened direction of Dr. George Wright, an authority in Labour Medicine and a foremost pioneer on this continent in the field of physiology.

The chrysotile mines in Canada being responsible for some 40% of the world chrysotile mining production, it was not possible to avoid the pursuit of research in those fields beyond mining and milling proper and not to embark into further fields such as manufacturing, processing and uses.

As a result, since the establishment of the Institute of Occupational and Environmental Health in 1966, the industry has sponsored and continues to support major epidemiological and other research projects designed to eliminate asbestos-related health risks not only for thousands of asbestos production workers, but also for worldwide fabricators, applicators and users of the vast range of asbestos-containing products.