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Downplaying the Risk of Mesothelioma from Asbestos Containing
Products in the Railway System

Jacksonville, Florida, November 30, 1977; AKS:lke

Mr. J. L. Williams
Vice President-Operations

Reference is made to your letter to me dated September 9, 1977, copy to Mr. Waldo F. Wingate, in regard to asbestos containing products that are used on the railroad.

Mesothelioma is a highly malignant tumor involving the pleura or the lining of the lungs and chest cavity. Workers in the asbestos industry have been found to have a high incidence of this otherwise very rare tumor. I am not familiar with the multiple products listed, but it would occur to me that only those products where asbestos fibers are being used in a loose, dry state should be eliminated and substitutes found, if possible. It is noted that the OSHA standards tend to agree with this position in that no labeling is required for any product containing asbestos fibers which have been modified by a bonding agent, coating, binder or other materials so that during any reasonably foreseeable use, handling, storage, disposal, processing or transportation, no airborne concentration of the asbestos fibers in excess of the exposure limits which were described will be released. This was contained in Mr. Wingate's report to you of September 16th.

In the political climate of our times in which every misfortune must be blamed on somebody, particularly if that somebody has money, it is to be expected that every case of cancer, regardless of the type or location, occurring in any employee will present an opportunity for some ambitious attorney to make some sort of a case against the company. I think the recommendations from Mr. Wingate are reasonable, but I would perhaps go a little bit further. Asbestos has been given a great deal of publicity and, where possible, it is suggested products be used that will serve the same purpose but do not contain asbestos.

Adney K. Sutphin, M. D.
Chief Medical Officer

cc:

✓ Mr. Waldo F. Wingate