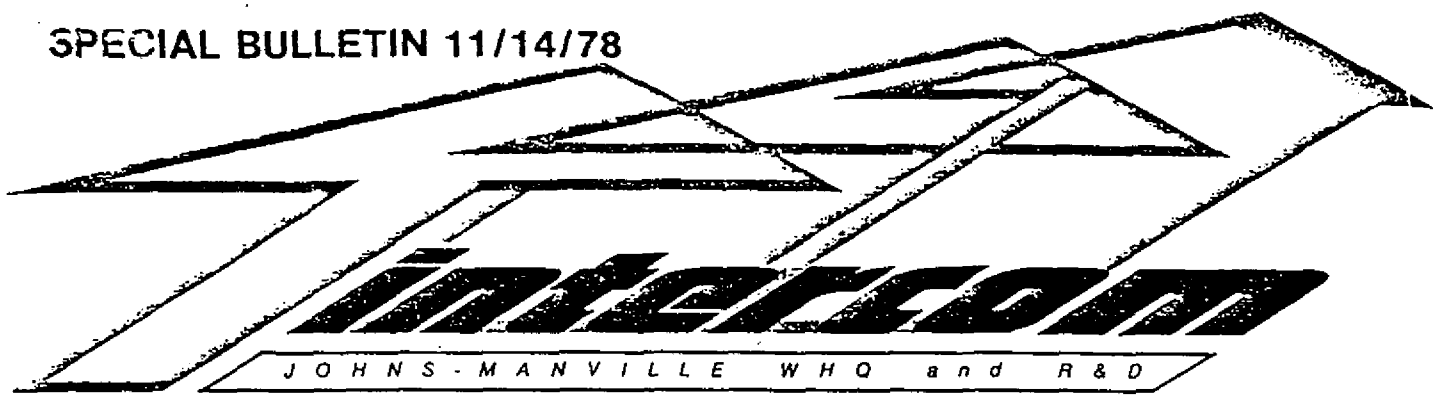
SPECIAL BULLETIN 11/14/78



BULLETIN EDITION

JOHNS-MANVILLE ACTED RESPONSIBLY AND WITH CONCERN. J-M EXECUTIVE STATES IN CONGRESSIONAL TESTIMONY

DENVER, Colorado (November 14, 1978) — A senior executive of Johns-Manville, in testimony before a House of Representatives Subcommittee, labeled as "categorically false" the charges of irresponsibility and conspiracy made against the corporation with regard to notifying workers about the dangers of asbestos and asbestos insulations. Francis H. May, Jr., executive vice president of Johns-Manville, testified in Honolulu before a House Subcommittee on Compensation, Health and Safety. He called upon the committee members to provide innovative, progressive and effective legislation to establish a uniform, equitable and comprehensive means of providing compensation to those with asbestos-related occupational diseases.

Mr. May stated that the company had responded positively and responsibly to hazards as soon as they were known. He also charged that rash statements made by lawyers representing plaintiffs in asbestos-related lawsuits had been accepted "all too quickly at face value," since facts clearly show that Johns-Manville has acted responsibly and with concern for workers' safety.

Responding to charges made against the corporation at the subcommittee's prior hearings in San Francisco, Mr. May outlined the affirmative steps the corporation had taken to improve working conditions and control exposure to asbestos dust.

Mr. May pointed out that there was a conscious effort in the material submitted at the San Francisco hearings to imply that by 1930 there existed an abundance of knowledge of a potential health hazard to workers exposed to asbestos-containing products. "This simply was not true," he stated. He went on to explain that it was not until the landmark 1964 work of Dr. Irving J. Selikoff, that there was any reason to believe that there was a danger to insulation workers from asbestos-containing products. He supported his conclusion by referring to an epidemiological study, which concluded that insulation work was not a hazardous occupation and by pointing out that the actual measured exposures in the work place were well below the 5 million particles per cubic foot (MPPCF) standard, which had been recommended by the United States Public Health Service (USPHS) as a safe level.

"While the charge that lives were sacrificed for profits makes for good copy and a rousing jury argument—it simply is not true," Mr. May testified.

Mr. May said that Johns-Manville responded promptly just as soon as the company learned of a British study suggesting a possible occupational disease hazard of asbestosis in asbestos textile factories where exposures to 100 percent raw fiber were for long periods of time.

To determine the seriousness of the situation, Johns-Manville and Raybestos-Manhattan Corporation commissioned the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company to begin a research study, the scope and depth of which is readily recognized by labor and the government.

"Based upon the limited medical information available in the 1929-30 period, I think it was a highly responsible and responsive action. And, remember that at this time no action on the subject had been undertaken by any agency of the federal government. In fact, several more years would pass before the government first acted," Mr. May stated.

Beyond this study, Johns-Manville installed major dust control devices in its plants. "We did this at a time when there were no mandatory governmental standards or requirements. This is hardly the course an irresponsible company would take, now is it?", Mr. May asked.

"Johns-Manville led the industry in caution labeling, and led the federal government by six years. This voluntary labeling program began in September of 1964, immediately following knowledge of research studies indicating that the 5 MPPCF level recommended by the USPHS was not a safe level and represented a possible hazard to insulation workers," Mr. May emphasized.

(continued on back)

PUBLISHED BY CORPORATE RELATIONS