DUST AND ITS RELATION TO OUR OPERATIONS

OCCUPATIONAL DISEASE LAWS RELATING TO DUST

Events in recent years have created a widespread interest in the effect of industrial dusts upon the worker. Already in some states laws have been enacted compensating dust diseases. Other states are considering similar legislation. Under these laws compensation is granted for disability from breathing harmful dust created or present in the working environment. The laws usually give power to the state labor department to set up rules and regulations relative to dust and dusty operations.

COMMON LAW

A number of states have no specific laws relating to disabilities alleged to have been caused by harmful dust. In these states there exists the right of an employee to claim under common law, an injury due to negligence of the employer. Such a case is tried before a regular court before a judge and a jury. The employee must show by a preponderance of evidence that he was injured due to the negligence of the employer. Common law cases are expensive for us to defend. Any failure on the part of managers to keep dust collecting equipment maintained or follow good housekeeping principles can be brought out in a common law action.

TYPES OF DUST

Dusts may be divided into (1) harmful and (2) non-harmful dusts. Silica and asbestos dusts are definitely known to be harmful dusts. They produce, over long periods of time in high concentrations, fibrosis of the lungs which can be disabling and even cause death due to complications from tuberculosis and pneumonia.

Most dusts do not produce fibrosis or disability--they are absorbed in the body fluids. Gypsum, lime, clay, mica, marble dusts, if they are relatively pure, are classed as harmless dusts. Nevertheless, excessive concentrations of any dusts have been condemned by some medical authorities. Already, in several states, maximum limits of dustiness, for even the harmless dusts, have been set up. These regulations have not affected us so far on our gypsum and lime operations, but they will not permit us to operate in a cloud of dust. The limits, however, are low for operations involving silica and asbestos dust, while they are much higher for gypsum and lime.

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WHAT IS COMING IN DUST LEGISLATION

We may expect regulation on permissible dustiness in practically all of the states now having comprehensive workmen's compensation laws. The U. S. Department of Labor is bringing such legislation before the states and recommending enactment of rules and regulations. Medical authorities are condemning high concentrations of industrial dusts and point to high incidence of respiratory infections in the dusty trades as proof of their contentions. The employer is held responsible for the dust in the man's working environment. If this dust injures or disables him, the employer may have to pay—whether it be through compensation or common law.

MEETING THE DUST PROBLEM

A dusty plant cannot be changed overnight into a clean plant. We must begin now. The company has already installed dust collecting equipment in most of its plants where it is needed. This equipment must be maintained at maximum efficiency. It must not be allowed to deteriorate due to poor or improper maintenance. A dust collecting system is designed for a specific job and if the conditions change or additions to the system are made, the entire system should be checked for collecting efficiency. The effectiveness of dust collection at one point can be entirely eliminated by dust leaks in conveyors, elevators, mixers, etc. It is a simple matter in most cases to stop dust leaks. Control the dust at the source. Dust collectors should be given the same consideration you give electric motors.

If, after following good housekeeping principles, stopping dust leaks in equipment and putting present dust collecting equipment in good operating condition, dusty conditions still prevail, then authorities for needed collecting equipment should be prepared and presented on the basis of dust elimination. But first let us make the best use of what we have.

When changes are made on new equipment installed, the question of dust must be given consideration. No installation or change is complete without taking care of the dust generated by the operation. If collectors are installed, the authority should not be closed until approval of the installation by state authorities is obtained (if such is required or can be obtained on request.

Some infrequent operations are dusty. It is not practical to install collectors to take care of these situations. Respirators should be available for use on such jobs. A plant must always be in position to supply a man a respirator if he asks for one. Some states do not permit respirators to be worn for protection against dust arising from regular operation. In exposure to dusts which

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contain little or no asbestos, respirators are for the comfort of the men. In dusts containing high percentage of silica or asbestos, the respirators should be required to protect against the hazard. Medical authorities, however, point out that control of the dust at the source is the preferred method of protection.

The laws relating to dust vary in each state. Many new rules and regulations relating to dust are being set up. The responsibility of knowing what is required by state laws or regulations rests with the Works Manager. It is part of his managerial responsibility to comply or explain why compliance is impossible. Many general regulations on dust exist, but if the manager is aware of these he can operate with a knowledge of the regulation in mind. An interpretation can always be secured from our attorneys as to what constitutes compliance with the statute.

PREVIOUS DUST EXPOSURE OF NEW EMPLOYEES

The occupational experience of new employees must be carefully scrutinized for exposure to silica or asbestos dusts. With the enactment of occupational disease laws, a number of men with silicosis or asbestosis have been thrown out of employment. These men may seek employment at our plants. If you have reason to suspect exposure to silica or asbestos dust in high concentrations over several years, the safe thing is to have the man X-rayed and have the X-ray referred to Chicago for interpretation. Foundry workers, hard rock miners and sand blasters are apt to have lung fibrosis due to dust.

CONTROL OF DUST A PROBLEM OF THE MANAGER

Many of the company's products are merely dust put into containers and sold. Therefore, potentially, with careless operation the company's plants can be very dusty places. Social consciousness has been awakened to the hazard and nuisance of industrial dust and we have no alternative but to recognize this and control the dust made in our plants. Control of dust must, therefore, be considered as a safety problem and dealt with accordingly. It represents a cost of manufacture which we cannot avoid. Thereby it becomes management's responsibility to do the job well and do it economically.

We commend to your attention Bulletin No. 4-5-1 on the Elimination of Dusty Conditions. The management requires compliance with these regulations by your foremen, your workers and you.

JSO:MT
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