FILE NAME: Brakes (BRK)

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BALTIMORE COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
DIVISION OF AIR POLLUTION AND INDUSTRIAL HYGIENE
MARYLAND AVENUE AND HILLEN ROAD
TOWSON, MARYLAND 21204

DONALD J. ROOP, M.D., M.P.H.
DEPUTY STATE AND COUNTY HEALTH OFFICER

December 4, 1972

Gentlemen:

Re: The Occupational Hazard of Brake Mechanics and What To Do About It

There are a number of products made with asbestos, a fire-resistant mineral fiber which is usually whitish gray in color. In 1971 the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency declared asbestos a hazardous air pollutant, making its use subject to extreme restrictions. People who are occupationally exposed to certain asbestos products incur an increased risk of developing some forms of cancer as a result of the hazard of inhaling the fibers. It has still not been established what levels of continuous exposure can be declared safe, although standards for occupational exposure have been established.

One group of workers, among whom the hazards are not generally realized, is brake mechanics. In 1970 British researchers measured the asbestos fiber concentrations that brake mechanics are exposed to. The usual method of cleaning brake drums and shoes of settled and imbedded dust, which contains a significant percentage of asbestos, is to blow the parts clean with a compressed air hose. Fiber counts generated by this method were in excess of the British limits for occupational exposure.

The antidote - vacuum out all the fiber you can. Then, if there is still more grit to remove by forced air, follow both of these measures if possible:

1. Wear a dust mask (cost: about $6.00)
2. Work in a well-ventilated area

Needless to say, all other workmen in the area should benefit by the above improvements.

For men who have had long experience as brake mechanics, we recommend that an annual chest X-ray be performed, and the examining physician be notified that the man works with asbestos.

We would very much appreciate it if you would let us know what action you are taking, what ideas you may have to offer, and what problems you encounter in following our suggestions in providing a safe workplace for your people. Should you require additional information contact Mr. Barry Castleman, of this office, at 494-3775.

Very truly yours,

William L. Phillips, Director
Division of Air Pollution and
Industrial Hygiene
Bureau of Environmental Services

WLP/BIC/mav