

THE ASBESTOS INFORMATION COMMITTEE

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PLAINTIFF'S
EXHIBIT
CT-14

MEMORANDUM FOR THE INFORMATION OF MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT

issued on behalf of four leading companies
who represent the major part of the British
Asbestos Industry.

ASBESTOS AND HEALTH

Asbestos is a vital raw material with a unique combination of properties. It is an essential ingredient in brake and clutch linings and gaskets in the motor industry because it imparts efficiency at high temperatures. In fact, safety on the road depends on asbestos. Because of its fire resistance, asbestos is used in the boards which line ships' cabins, to isolate fires and prevent their spread. Safety at sea depends on it and there is no efficient substitute. It is also used for heat insulation and fire prevention in schools and other buildings where large numbers of people have to congregate; countless lives have been saved because asbestos-based partitions have contained fires or asbestos protection of steelwork has delayed the collapse of a burning building. Its high mechanical strength and stability lead to its use as a reinforcing material for asbestos-cement and insulation. It is spun and woven to make cloth for protective uses. There are thousands of other essential products in which asbestos plays an indispensable role.

Risks to health associated with asbestos are arousing interest not only in this country but internationally. There is no doubt that because this country tends to set the lead in matters of industrial hygiene, any action taken here will be closely watched abroad, and it is therefore of crucial importance that new British regulations should be both effective and practicable. The Ministry of Labour is drafting revised regulations to control the handling of asbestos in the docks, in factories and by industrial users.

These new regulations are welcomed in principle by the asbestos industry, which has collaborated in framing the early drafts and has spent much time in demonstrating to Government Departments the progress which can be made with effective methods of control. The effect of the regulations will not be, in the main, to make existing controls stiffer (because they have been proved to be successful in asbestos factories), but to ensure that they are more widely applied. Most workers who handle finished asbestos products are not exposed to any asbestos dust, but some who have to handle fibre through the docks, to machine asbestos products regularly or to fit or strip insulation, may be at risk. It is these categories in particular for whom the more comprehensive regulations will provide protection.

What are the risks? Asbestos is only a risk to health if substantial amounts of airborne asbestos dust are inhaled. Only in extremely rare cases has there been any suggestion that incidental exposure to asbestos dust has been harmful, and proof has been lacking. The general public is not exposed in this way, but there is an occupational risk, which has been and is being increasingly controlled, to people who work with asbestos. Two diseases are involved, asbestosis (a fibrosis of the lung which sometimes develops later into lung cancer), and mesothelioma (a cancer of the pleura or peritoneum). Both diseases are rare but the number of cases diagnosed each year involving some degree of disablement has been increasing. In 1966 there were 114 cases of asbestosis. In the last 15 years there have been about 200 reported cases of mesothelioma.

There are several reasons for the increase in the number of reported cases of asbestosis. They include the big increase in the numbers employed in the industry from 1939 onwards; higher standard of diagnosis; increased longevity, linked with the fact that the disease may take many years to develop; and the absence

of effective control until comparatively recently in certain operations involving fibrous asbestos products such as insulation lagging.

No risk to the public

It is important to emphasise that despite the recent intensive general investigations into the health hazards of exposure to asbestos dust, there is no measurable risk to the general public for example from asbestos materials in buildings, asbestos in domestic appliances such as stove mats or ironing boards or from dust produced by the wear on brake linings.

Successful Control of Asbestosis

This health risk has been recognised in the industry for nearly 40 years, and the first Asbestos Industry Regulations were introduced in 1931 following a Home Office report the previous year by Dr. E.R.A. Moreweather and Mr. C.W. Price which confirmed an association between lung fibrosis and asbestos dust in factories which was called "asbestosis". At the time of this first report the main firms in the asbestos industry had already introduced new precautions which formed the basis of the 1931 Regulations. Since 1931 British asbestos manufacturers have continuously improved their comprehensive measures for the controlled handling of asbestos in their factories and the health problems of manufacturing have been largely solved. It has been shown that asbestosis occurs extremely rarely where dust concentrations have been reduced to low levels, as in the principal asbestos factories.

For example, an expert statistical study of the mortality of long-service workers in a large asbestos textile factory has shown that as a result of the preventive measures taken since 1933 both the total cancer rate and the lung cancer rate, for men employed for 20 years or more since 1933, are no greater than for the population as a whole.

The Asbestosis Research Council

The Asbestosis Research Council was set up 10 years ago by the three largest companies in the British asbestos industry and has since been supported by five other British companies, and by the Johns-Manville Corporation in the U.S.A., the Quebec Asbestos Mining Association and James Hardie Asbestos Limited of Australia. The industry provides the Council with funds to prosecute a programme of research into the causation and prevention of disease associated with asbestos. Its work has been concerned with prevention, diagnosis and pathology and has been carried out both in the industry's own research and development laboratories and at Cambridge, Reading, Newcastle and Leeds Universities.

The development of improved methods of dust control in asbestos factories has been the Council's principal contribution in the sphere of prevention. This work has evolved better methods of enclosing plant and processes to prevent dust emission, better methods of measuring dust to provide a reliable index of dust concentration and investigation into the efficiency of various types of respirator in the asbestos industry.

In the field of diagnosis, much work has been done on the possibility of diagnosing lung dis-function before either a clinical diagnosis or radiological change has occurred. This has already shown promising results. Pathological work has been and is being conducted on the formation of fibrous tissue in the lung.

The Council's current programme continues all these studies but also includes work on mesothelial tumours, study of the physico-chemical properties of asbestos, an immunological study in the asbestos industry and a study of the use of steroid drugs in the treatment of asbestosis. Further work is also being carried out to establish criteria for safe environmental conditions.

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Rare Incidence of Mesothelioma

The recent association between asbestos and mesothelioma is a relatively new factor in the situation. The rarity of this disease is demonstrated by the fact that while there were about 29,000 deaths during 1966 in the U.K. from all forms of lung cancer, fewer than 50 cases of mesothelioma are being reported here each year, not all of which have a history of association with asbestos.

It has however been suggested that mesothelioma can be caused in certain cases by more limited exposures than are required for asbestosis. There is very little evidence of risk of mesothelioma from the most commonly used type of asbestos - white (chrysotile), and there have never been any cases linked conclusively with amosite. There is some evidence that the main risk of mesothelioma is associated with blue asbestos (crocidolite). It is important to bear in mind, in this connection, that the proportions of imports into Britain last year were 95.5% white asbestos (chrysotile), 3.6% amosite and only 0.9% blue asbestos (crocidolite). However, so long as the medical evidence remains inconclusive, the industry feels that it must play for safety and has already taken special steps, in advance of the new Regulations, which should eliminate any possible mesothelioma hazard.

New Measures of Protection

As has been said, the asbestos industry welcomes and is collaborating in the formulation of the wider regulations which are being introduced by the Ministry of Labour and has already adopted the following additional measures to ensure the greatest possible protection of those handling asbestos against any health hazard that may be associated with this essential fibre.

1. All asbestos fibre is now shipped to the U.K. in dust-proof bags. In addition all bags of blue (crocidolite) fibre are stacked on pallets which can be handled mechanically. These arrangements are making asbestos safe to handle in transit.
2. The industry has limited the use of blue asbestos to products in which it is absolutely essential, and is rendering the processes and products themselves safe beyond any doubt.
3. A sum of £100,000 has been allocated to the Asbestosis Research Council for an expanded programme of research into means of prevention of risks to health over the next five years. This is in addition to the £500,000 already being spent each year by the three largest companies in the industry alone on research into these questions, on medical services and on equipment for the protection of their own employees.
4. Codes of Practice have been prepared and published for the insulation industry and the building and shipbuilding industries, and are being prepared for other industries which use asbestos. By extending the standards of safety already existing in the asbestos industry itself the adoption of these Codes of Practice will ensure that those who work with asbestos in other industries are properly protected.
5. Further steps will be taken if their desirability is revealed by research. In the meantime the industry has set up the Asbestos Information Committee to ensure that the facts are readily available to the public.

The Future Outlook

It is important to recognise that because asbestosis and mesothelioma normally take a very long time to develop, some cases will still come to light, and for a while in increasing

numbers. Over the years, however, the steps now being taken will reduce the risk to health to those workers not previously covered by regulations or Codes of Practice, as significantly as the original Asbestos Industry Regulations reduced the risk of asbestosis in factories.

This statement is issued jointly by the following British firms:

Turner & Newall Limited
Cape Asbestos Company Limited
BEA Group Limited
Central Asbestos Company Limited

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