

FROM J.B. CHAPPELL
Training and Safety Officer.

TO MR. ROBERT P. CARTER
Health and Environment
Department,
Pittsburgh Office 7AB.

JBC/AET.

28th April 1976.

Alternatives to Asbestos

We recently received a copy of your letter of 30th March 1976 via our Purchasing Manager, Mr. J.M.S. Roberts, and felt that we should inform you of the action that has been taken to eliminate where possible the use of asbestos on this site.

In metal melting and pouring operations:

1. Replacing the seal between static and portable pouring launders with Kaowool, a proprietary brand of ceramic fibre.
2. Using Ciment Fondue and crushed refractory brick instead of rammed asbestos fibre or Marinite board as launder lining.
3. Substituting hand-formed furnace tap-hole plugs made from dampened asbestos fibre with pre-formed Fibrefax Cones, made from Aluminium Silicate.
4. We are still using pre-machined (at the supplier's) Marinite components for pouring floats (distributors) which we assemble prior to use, but are endeavouring to improve handling, transportation and storage to reduce minor damage and the subsequent dust and small particles arising from poor housekeeping.

Elsewhere in the plant we are examining protective clothing, e.g. gloves, for handling hot rolled plate and seeking alternatives.

As a result of information recently released in this country there has been a spate of reports in the media and we enclose photocopies of articles reproduced in two of our more responsible national daily newspapers, The Times and The Daily Telegraph.

We will keep you informed of future developments.

ccmg Cap - 5/12/76

J. Chappell

Encs:

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Daily Telegraph June 29 1976

KILLER ASBESTOS FACTORY 'FAILURE' BY INSPECTORS

DAILY TELEGRAPH REPORTER

SIR ALAN MARRE, the Ombudsman, has taken Government factory inspectors to task for their handling of a "killer" asbestos factory at Hebden Bridge in Yorkshire.

In a 45-page report released yesterday, Sir Alan concludes that "the quality of the attention given to Acre Mill was not as high as it could and should have been."

He strongly suggests the inspectors should have prosecuted the owners for failing to implement adequate dust control measures.

Community leaders in West Yorkshire claim that 40 former employees have died and more will die from the lung disease asbestosis contracted at the Acre Mill plant, closed down by its owners in 1970.

Lawyers representing the workers say that Cape Industries, which ran the factory, have paid out some £2 million in damages in the past six years. All but two of the cases have been settled out of court, with the highest single compensation figure standing at £35,000.

Fresh concern

In Hebden Bridge yesterday there was fresh concern over the dumping of asbestos waste in the neighbourhood.

A junior and infant school 100 yards from one of the biggest tips has halted nature walks in the area, and members of a local Asbestos Action Committee are pressing the West Yorks County Council to cover the asbestos waste.

The Ombudsman's report is certain to be used by MPs to demand a public inquiry into the continuing tragedies at Hebden Bridge and to investigate the benefits and hazards of asbestos.

"I shall use this as a battering ram to get a very urgent public inquiry into all aspects of asbestos," said Mr. Max Madden, Labour MP for Sowerby, who brought the issue to the Ombudsman a year ago.

"The community should be able to decide whether the risks are acceptable in the light of the benefits of asbestos."

Lungs scarred

Asbestosis results from the scarring of the lungs by tiny dust particles. There is no known "safe" limit for the estimated 100,000 people working closely with asbestos, and the disease can take as long as 15 to 25 years to mature.

The Ombudsman's report tackles only the role of Government factory inspectors.

"I think that the district staff at Halifax—the responsible inspectors—could and should have shown greater determination at various times over several years to put further pressure on the management at Acre Mill," Sir Alan said in the conclusion to his report.

"I am not convinced that they were sufficiently decisive either in conveying to the management the sense of urgency that was appropriate or in pursuing the question of a prosecution when, over a period of years, improvements were not forthcoming."

'Model' plant

The report discloses that Acre Mill was for a time regarded by local factory inspectors as a "model" plant to which trainee inspectors were taken to demonstrate the working of regulations for the asbestos industry. Regulations framed in 1931 were tightened in 1969.

Sir Alan's year-long investigations into Acre Mill show that inspectors' reports on the plant were peppered with criticisms for almost 20 years.

The threat of prosecution was mooted at least three times, and one former factory inspector told the Ombudsman that he would "probably" have reconsidered taking Cape to court had he not been transferred from the area in 1966.

The report quotes the minutes of a conference held by the chief factory inspector last year "that with hindsight it might have been better to have allowed the district inspector to prosecute."

'Over friendly'

But the Ombudsman exonerates the factory inspectors, now part of the semi-independent Health and Safety Executive, on

a series of allegations which included the improper destruction of files relating to Acre Mill, the failure of Cape Asbestos to display factory regulations at the plant and an "over-friendly" relationship between the inspectors and the Acre Mill management.

Mr Madden yesterday dismissed Government plans to mount a review of the latest asbestos regulations as an insufficient response to the Ombudsman's report.

"We do not want a hole-in-the-corner review conducted in secret. In my view, the whole thing should be dragged out into the open, and an inquiry should be conducted in public," he said.

"I feel that if the asbestos industry is confident of the quality and the benefits of its product and have taken the action they should have done under the 1969 regulations, then they should have nothing to fear from such a public inquiry," Mr Madden added.

'Pretty mild'

Mr John Pickering, the Manchester lawyer who has represented most of the Acre Mill workers in damages suits, said that the Ombudsman's report, which did not deal with Cape's involvement, was "pretty mild."

"Those who have had to deal with this know what an absolutely appalling problem it is. There are a colossal number of cases, and the problem is far greater than is generally accepted."

A spokesman for Cape Industries said yesterday that the closure of Acre Mill in 1970 was "for economic and commercial reasons" and was unconnected with the incidence of asbestosis.

The spokesman added that it would "not be appropriate" for the company to comment on the Ombudsman's report which dealt with the factory inspectors.

Daily Telegraph ASBESTOS DANGER 'TO 200'

By PETER GILL

A FRESH investigation into the health hazards of asbestos has been promised by the Government yesterday after the release of a report on the "killer" asbestos plant at Hebden Bridge, Yorkshire.

Sir Alan Marre, the Ombudsman, says in his report that there were 50 reported cases of the lung disease asbestosis between 1964 and the closure of the Acre Mill factory in 1970.

But these figures were branded yesterday as "a massive understatement of the position" by Mr. Max Madden, Labour MP for Sowerby, who brought the Acre Mill case to the Ombudsman.

Mr Madden said that 40 former employees at the plant, which opened in 1939, had died and a further 200 were suffering from asbestosis—caused by asbestos particles scarring the lungs.

Report accepted

Mr Harold Walker, Under-Secretary for Employment, said yesterday that he accepted the Ombudsman's criticisms of the factory inspectors who handled Acre Mill and the Chief Inspector of Factories agrees with hindsight, that even with the difficulties they then faced, they could have enforced the regulations more rigorously.

Dr Bertram Mann, the consultant chest physician who diagnosed nearly all the cases of asbestosis arising from Acre Mill said yesterday he feared there could be up to 350 cases of the disease in the area over the next 15-20 years.

He said that there were 57 new cases in 1974 and 26 cases last year.

Dr Mann said that about six people who had the disease had not worked at the factory but were only resident in the area.

Report—P5

Safety move after new asbestos link with cancer

By Neville Hodgkinson

An urgent review of precautions surrounding the use of asbestos has been started by the Health and Safety Executive in the light of a growing body of evidence that it is a potent cause of cancer.

In certain forms it is feared to be a threat to the public as well as to those working with it; yet because of its resistance to heat and acid it is in widespread household and industrial use.

Factory inspectors are being asked to report on the degree of compliance with and difficulties of enforcement of the Asbestos Regulations of 1969. There is particular concern over demolition and de-lagging work, because of the large amounts of asbestos dust that may be released into the atmosphere.

The Asbestos Regulations do not specify obligations to those who are not workpeople, and an extension of the Health and Safety Executive's powers may be sought to improve the protection given to the public.

Warnings to home handymen about the dangers of inhaling the dust while working with asbestos products, and of the need to seal them to prevent fibres flaking off and contaminating the home, are being worked out between the Department of Prices and Consumer Protection and the asbestos industry, with help from the Employment Medical Advisory Service.

It is nearly eight years since a recommendation that such warnings should be issued was made by the standing subcommittee on cancer of the Department of Health's standing medical advisory committee.

In a confidential report entitled *Control of the cancer hazard due to asbestos to the general population* the committee said it had been shown that mesothelioma, a malignant tumour originating in the lining of the chest or stomach, could be produced by slight exposure to asbestos, and that on present knowledge it had to be assumed that no amount of exposure was completely free from the risk.

The report, which has only just come to light, added: "The use of asbestos is so widespread that it is not practicable to reduce exposure by protecting individual members of the public and efforts should be concentrated on reducing the amount of asbestos dust in the atmosphere."

When the advisory committee's report was written, the observed annual incidence of mesothelioma deaths had risen

Precautions are urged over asbestos

Continued from page 1

to about 120 a year, compared with a total of 200 cases recorded over the 15 years up to 1966. The number is now running at more than 200 a year, but because of difficulties in diagnosis the true incidence may be much higher.

Stringent precautions are taken to keep down the level of dust among workers regularly exposed to asbestos. Because of inadequate standards in the past, hundreds of workers have died and still are dying from asbestosis, scarring of the lungs caused by inhala-

tion of asbestos fibres.

The condition is irreversible, untreatable, progressive, and often disabling or fatal.

A maximum level of exposure of two fibres a cubic centimetre of air was laid down in the 1969 regulations on the basis of advice from the British Occupational Hygiene Society.

However, doubt has been raised whether that is low enough; the United States Department of Labour has recently proposed a cut in the standard of five fibres to half a fibre a cubic centimetre.

Several retrospective studies have shown that in dusty con-

ditions asbestos workers run a greatly increased risk of developing lung cancer and that the dustier the conditions the greater the risk. Cigarette smoking enhances the danger. Abnormally high incidences of cancer of the oesophagus, stomach, colon and rectum have also been discovered.

Dr Irving Selikoff, of New York, a pioneer in asbestos epidemiology, has suggested that asbestos may cause cancers at other sites, including the brain, pancreas, and the genito-urinary area. Asbestos fibres have been found after death in various tissues and organs.