

J.W.Roberts Ltd.,

and Meeting 11th October 1957

Item No.11 (16)

Supplementary
REPORT ON MEDICAL ARRANGEMENTS SCHEME
J.W.ROBERTS LTD.

This report is submitted to the Board of J.W.Roberts Ltd., the working of the Medical Arrangements Scheme 1956-57.

The work of Dr. Hawbrock in conducting medical examinations and supervising the X-ray scheme continues. Batches of films with medical records are sent to me at Rochdale for review. This is a practice which is helpful to both Medical Officers and enables them to achieve uniformity of standards in judging cases.

It has transpired during 1956 that asbestosis had been found to occur for the first time in Sweden and Australia. The cases had occurred in connection with the use of spray products and it was evident that all the safety precautions developed at Leeds in connection with this process had not been used. In both countries regulations of a stringent character are being brought into operation to ensure the safety of the working population. These are rather severe and restrictive in their wording but this is not surprising in the climate of opinion which prevails today in all countries with regard to the hazards of employment. The standards achieved in working conditions, or claims made with regard to them, have become matters of national prestige. It is no secret that the U.S.S.R. has made claims to pre-eminence in the field of industrial hygiene with tighter limits of permissible toxic concentrations than the "Western" countries. These claims are being used for political ends through such international organisations as the I.L.O. at Geneva.

In the field of Research some interesting work has been done in association with the Cavendish Laboratory, Cambridge. This has demonstrated marked changes in fibres which have been inhaled and retained in the lung for many years and which could be demonstrated by electron microscopy. The co-relation of these changes with the onset of pathological conditions in the lung is the aim of these experiments.

A preliminary draft of the research work undertaken at leading University by Dr. P. F. Holt for three asbestos companies including T.B.A. Co. Ltd. has just come to hand. He has concentrated on the chemistry of chrysotile in its ability to release a silica fraction under conditions which are comparable

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with lung tissue and fluid environment. While it is realistic that this approach cannot solve the problem of human asbestosis Dr. Holt is able to conclude that if the chemical breakdown of the asbestos fibre follows the same course in vivo as it does in vitro a pneumoconiosis resembling silicosis would be expected. This is supporting evidence for the chemical theory to which we largely adhere. It is to be noted that work along these lines may be useful in helping to assess the fibrotic potentialities of other forms of asbestos.

On 11th September 1957 a meeting of leading executives of Turner Brothers Asbestos Co. Ltd., British Belting & Asbestos Co. Ltd. and the Cape Asbestos Co. Ltd. with their Medical Officers and Medical Research Workers took place in London at the offices of the Cape Asbestos Co. Ltd., Mr. R.G. Soothy took the chair and the formation of a joint body to organise research into the problems of asbestosis was agreed upon. The three companies concerned were to bear the expenses of the programme equally. It is hoped that results helpful to the whole industry will come from this combined effort.

Within the period under review, two important conferences on occupational medicine have been attended, and I am most grateful to the Directors for making this possible. In September 1956 there was a conference in London of the Industrial Medical Officers Association of Great Britain, and in July 1957 an International Conference attended by delegates from 44 countries was held in Helsinki. In both instances there was a wide ranging programme of subjects within the purview of occupational medicine in its more general aspects as well as scientific sectional meetings for those with a specialised interest. These opportunities for meeting medical colleagues in this country and from abroad in order to compare experience and share the results of preventative measures are exceedingly useful to the medical officers themselves and through them to their companies. The industrial medical officer who is largely engaged inside his industry has a feeling of isolation and opportunities to meet colleagues similarly engaged do not come as readily to him as to practitioners in the sphere of general medicine.

The suspension of 15 workers for asbestosis during the year came as a considerable surprise. It has been noted that all were awarded about 10% disability assessment even though the

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periods of exposure varied from 8-30 years. Details of age and length of exposure are given in the table below.

Years exposure	0 - 9	10 - 14	15 - 19	20 - 24	25 - 30
No. of cases	2	4	3	3	3
Average age in years	48	46	50	54	50

An assessment of 10% disability usually means, in my experience, a border line case. As far as I can judge 3 cases would merit suspension on ordinary Pneumoconiosis Board standards and these are all cases of more than 20 years exposure. That 15 border line cases were suspended in one sweep can only mean that all workers in whose cases claims were likely to be made at any time in the future were given a label to establish their rights to further disability awards.

I know of only one Rochdale worker who has been suspended after starting work as late as 1940 in scheduled areas. In the present Leeds list there are 6 such cases of workers starting in the period 1940-48. While there is some evidence of increased incidence of asbestosis in the Armley factory as compared with Rochdale a factor of this degree is quite disproportionate.

On 20th June last I was given a demonstration of the fibre spray process by Mr. N.L. Dolbey at Armley. At a later date I was able to see the process in action at the Carriage Works of Craven's in Sheffield. The safety precautions relating to the process have been very soundly built up and, according to personal observation and dust counts obtained with the old type of thermal precipitator the hazard would seem to be under control. This is another process which would merit review with the new dust counting equipment when it has been proved. I am grateful to Mr. N.L. Dolbey for making these arrangements.

With the diminished activities of the works of J.W. Roberts Ltd. of Leeds and the gradual transfer of their manufacturing functions to Hindley Green, a complete transformation of the conditions of work is being achieved. This desirable result will have undoubted benefits to all concerned.

J. F. Knox.