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April 18, 1977

Dr. Stephan Schmidheiny
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Switzerland

Dear Dr. Schmidheiny:

Francis May has asked me to respond to your letter of March 23 concerning the OCAW slide presentation. I am delighted to do so, particularly to explain J-M's participation and our own opinion of the final show.

At the request of an OCAW representative, I asked Walter Cooper, our Manager of Environmental Communications, to offer assistance from Johns-Manville to the free-lance writer developing the program. Thus we became involved at an early stage, and OCAW seemed very anxious to have our help. We were asked to provide any and all educational material we have developed to educate our employees about asbestos health concerns, which we did. We were also asked for slides showing dust control systems in asbestos operations, and we sent what we felt were the best and most representative. In addition we suggested other authorities in the field who should be contacted in order to ensure accuracy in the presentation.

Although we had no control over the end results and we did not see the program until several weeks after it had been completed and distribution had begun, we deemed it important to offer full cooperation to the union in this project. We felt that by offering factual, objective information, we might be able to influence to some extent the way in which industry was portrayed.

Not to have made that attempt, regardless of the outcome, would have been remiss on our part. We can only speculate how many more things you might have been dissatisfied with in the program had J-M not made an attempt to educate the writers.

The credit to J-M was given without our knowledge and without request on our part, although we would have had no objection to it if asked. The mere fact that a major international labor union came to us for some advice and help is a giant step forward to a better relationship with the labor community. If our cooperation spurs this and other unions to seek our advice in the future, we will have gained far more than we may have lost.

The Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers International Union is one of the most militant unions in the United States particularly in health and safety issues. Viewed in this light, the slide show is rather mild to us and in most respects responsible. It is important to realize that this presentation emphasizes hazards of asbestos exposure but it does not suggest a ban on the use of asbestos. With all the hysteria in the press both here and abroad and the situation in many other countries where the unions and the public are demanding for stronger controls (I am enclosing copies of letters to me from Dr. Tore Dalham and Dr. Ahlmark about the Swedish problems), we feel that J-M's position that asbestos can be used responsibly and without hazard is being accepted, more slowly perhaps than we would like, but nonetheless the point is getting across.

As for the misinformation you cited, these examples are not misstatements of fact but differences in emphasis.' For example, nonsmoking asbestos workers have a lung cancer rate less than that for the general population because smokers are included in the general population. At the same time the rate of lung cancer is higher among asbestos workers when smokers and nonsmokers both are considered. It is true that the synergistic effect of smoking and asbestos exposure is hardly mentioned in the OCAW program. This is one area where we still have to educate union leadership to gain their support for no-smoking programs for asbestos workers.

I hope that these comments help you to understand our position.

Cordially,