FILE NAME: Asbestos Sacks and Bags (ASB)

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ADNJ/ECH

20th August 1965.

Mr. Clogg,

Handling of Asbestos Fibre

I sought an interview with Mr. Bateman this morning on this subject and told him that there were one or two aspects of the present approved press statement about which we had some reservations. Unfortunately he was very busy and asked whether the matter could not be left over until Monday. I agreed that it was not that desperately urgent and he asked for arrangements to be made for Mr. Howard to explain his difficulties on Monday. I am not sure whether you would wish to see Mr. Bateman yourself or whether you would like to take the request literally, but perhaps I could leave that to you.

In the meantime I return the following papers -

1. Your copy of Mr. Howard's note of 17th August. I have unstapled this because it was my intention to show Mr. Bateman page 2 but not to disclose the existence of page 1, but to make the points in my own way. I rather feel that point 3 of Mr. Howards presupposes a particularly unfriendly attitude on the part of the press. Subject to that I find myself in general agreement with Mr. Howard, but I would have put the case in a slightly different way. The sentence that to my way of thinking stood out, was the one which said that the handling of fibre in hessian bags did not carry any specially dangerous health risk. To state the matter this way does, I think, rather invite adverse comment, because in that statement is the implicit admission that there is some health risk even though not a specially dangerous one. Once you admit that there is any the whole colour of the situation changes and I think one has to tackle it from a slightly different point of view. Incidentally, is the handling of fibre in hessian bags unpleasant because of the dust they give off or for some other reason? If the former, as I suspect, then it is almost impossible to take the line, in the present state of medical knowledge, that there is no particular risk.

2. A copy of the statement as approved by Mr. Bateman.

3. An additional copy of page 2 of Mr. Howard's note.

4. Dr. Knox's reply to my letter which, in my view, points the way to a satisfactory method of answering p r e s s enquiries.

ADN