

COMMUNIQUE

DR. MURRAY SAYS SUBSTITUTE FIBRES PROPOSED BY THE EPA ARE AS DANGEROUS AS ASBESTOS

Dr. Robert Murray is with the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine in London. He is also Chairman of the International Association of Occupational Medicine.

Dr. Robert Murray, of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, thinks that a ban on asbestos such as the EPA proposes is an unwarranted act that stems from an almost obsessive paranoia. This physician, who has specialized in occupational diseases related to asbestos since 1947, notes three flaws in the American agency's argument.

Dangerous Substitutes

First, according to Dr. Murray, comes the Agency's failure to ignore the threats posed by other mineral fibres mentioned as possible substitutes for asbestos. He maintains that these fibres, whether natural or synthetic, are as hazardous as asbestos. As a result, if regulations governing asbestos are to be adopted, he hopes that they will also extend to substitute fibres.

A Defective Methodology

The second flaw in the EPA study, according to Dr. Murray, is attributing instances of death to a single cause: asbestos. He argues that the agency systematically ignores other possible contributing factors and

thinks that the importance placed in asbestos is out of proportion: "Sir Richard Doll made the following calculation: if cancer were completely eliminated, life expectancy would be increased by about two years. If asbestos is responsible for as much as 1 or 2% of human cancers, then the increase in life expectancy following its elimination would be six to ten days. It would be much more appropriate to eliminate cigarettes or automobiles, which have a considerably greater impact on the quality and length of life."

Thirdly, Dr. Murray rejects the assertion that "a single fibre can be lethal". He notes that the risks are a function of the type of asbestos fibre and its physical dimensions. Moreover, he maintains that these risks can be controlled. As for the threats posed by asbestos in buildings, the British expert says that he has not found a shred of evidence in the EPA documents to allow that danger to be scientifically defined.

Dr. Murray points out that man has learned to control a number of hazardous industrial substances such as phosphorous or carbon disulfide without having to ban them. He recommends adopting the same positive attitude towards asbestos.